



AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN SIERRA LEONE

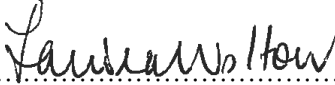
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DECLARATION

While registered as a candidate for the above degree, I have not been registered for any other research award. The results and conclusions embodied in this thesis are the work of the named candidate and have not been submitted for any other academic award.

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I dedicate this thesis to Edmond, the UN driver who accompanied me on several field visits and who sadly succumbed to Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) in 2014 and to everyone whose lives were claimed by the virus. I acknowledge the lives that were lost and the families who were devastated as a result of the mudslide in Freetown 2017.

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ABSTRACT

This investigative thesis aims to gain insight into the contextual reasons for women's low status in selected urban and rural districts in Sierra Leone through the collection and analysis of primary data that is absent from the development debate, and to examine routes of progression through combining practical fieldwork with the application of concepts referenced in my theoretical framework.

The study has four principal objectives. Firstly: to identify the main historical, economic, social and cultural issues that obstruct women's and girls' progress. Secondly: to identify the factors undermining the success of large-scale development programmes intended to empower extremely poor women. Third: based on results of my research to offer recommendations that demonstrate potential to resolve main issues that obstruct women's progress. Fourth: to examine possible routes of progression and propose ways in which they may be integrated into future policy and programming.

I apply a semi-ethnographic, qualitative approach in collecting and analysing the key data that constitute the core of this study, comprising material drawn from interviews with women's networks, women's advocacy groups and community women. I contrast this data with perspectives of funders and actors responsible for delivering development initiatives – UN agencies, INGOs, senior government officials and civil servants, NGOs and CBOs. Applying this method of triangulation enables me to identify and crosscheck disconnects in development structures. I highlight the prime factors that block successful outcomes of such initiatives: the toleration of corruption; elite distancing from objectives and the absence of a dialogue between women and the bureaucratic structure.

Based on the results from my research, I advocate the revision of development policy and programming so that it is contextual (country and district specific) and inclusive of women, fully recognising women's role as integral in the development process. I propose the adoption of Contextual Development (CD), a comprehensive concept rooted in local knowledge that prioritises and addresses the needs of the disadvantaged as a route of progression that has the potential to improve project impact and outcome.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

A4P	Agenda for Prosperity
ADB	African Development Bank Group
AdB	African Development Bank
APC	All People's Congress
ARCSR	Architecture of Rapid Change and Scarce Resources
BDWN	Bombali District Women's Network
BRA	Bike Riders Association
BRAC	Bangladesh Rehabilitation Assistance Committee
BV	Buen Vivir
CADEPS	Community Action for Development Programmes and Services
CBE	Competency-based Education
CBO	Community Based Organisation
CCT	Conditional Cash Transfer
CLTS	Community Led Total Sanitation
CLTSP	Community Led Total Sanitation Programme
CRA	Child Rights Act
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CSA	Cassette Sellers Association
DFID	Department for International Development
ECOMOG	The Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EFA	Education for All
ESP	Education Sector Plan
EU	European Union
EVD	Ebola Virus Disease
FAO	Food Aid Organisation?
FAWE	Forum for African Women Educationalists
FGC	Female Genital Cutting
FGM/C	Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting
FSU	Family Support Unit
GBV	Gender Based Violence
GDI	Gender Development Index
GDP	Gross Domestic Product

GEC	Girls' Education Challenge
GEI	Gender Equity Index
GEM	Global Education Monitoring
GII	Gender Inequality Index
GoSL	Government of Sierra Leone
GT	Grounded Theory
HDI	Human Development Index
HDR	Human Development Report
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HND	Higher National Diploma
ICAI	Independent Commission for Aid Impact
IDC	International Development Committee
ILMS	Ivor Leigh Memorial School
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
IVS	Inland Valley Swamps
JSS	Junior Secondary School
LMU	London Metropolitan University
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MEST	Ministry of Education, Science and Technology
MM	Milton Margai
MMCET	Milton Margai College of Education and Technology
MP	Member of Parliament
MRU	Mano River Union
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
MSWGCA	The Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
NASSIT	National Social Security Insurance Trust
NCSO	National Commission of Sexual Offences
NEP	National Education Policy
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NHI	National Happiness Index
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
RUF	Revolutionary United Front

SBV	Sexual Based Violence
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SHG	Self Help Group
SIGI	Social Institutions and Gender Index
SLAUW	Sierra Leone Association of University Women
SLPP	Sierra Leone People's Party
SLWMP	Sierra Leone Women's Movement for Peace
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa
SSS	Senior Secondary School
TBA	Traditional Birth Attendant
TD	Transition Discourse
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children Fund
UPE	Universal Primary Education
UPRSL	Universal Periodic Review of Sierra Leone Sierra Leone
US	United States
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VAG	Violence Against Girls
VAWG	Violence Against Women and Girls
WASH	Water, Sanitation, Hygiene Public Health Programmes
WB	World Bank
WEF	World Economic Forum

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DISSEMINATION OF RESEARCH

Conference Papers and Presentations:

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1. INTRODUCTION

In 2001 Angela King, the United Nations (UN) Special Advisor on Gender Issues made a statement on the advancement of women:

There can be no peace without gender equality and no development without both peace and equality, I wish to pay tribute to all the women of Sierra Leone who, in very trying conditions, continue to be at the forefront of the national struggle to rebuild society’.

(King cited in Baksh-Soodeen & Etchart, 2002, p. 202)

Since then, the situation has changed very little. In 2013, Sierra Leone was ranked 139 out of 148 countries in the Human Development Report’s (HDR) Gender Inequality Index (GII)¹. The majority of extremely poor and disadvantaged women in Sierra Leone are illiterate and do not have the means to access or participate in the political process. Apart from a small, educated elite, women are invisible in the process of government policymaking regarding the structure and content of national healthcare, education and welfare programmes and other issues that have a direct impact on their lives². My research offers fresh insights into the underlying factors that contribute to women’s exclusion. In particular I explore the degree to which culture and tradition actively restrict women’s decision-making power.

Despite an official government commitment to enact the legislative framework designed to advance the position of women, implementation has remained weak and the legislation has proven to be ineffective in achieving the stated aim of supporting women. The subsequent chapters of this thesis document and discuss the issues that have had - and continue to have - a negative impact on the women of Sierra Leone, which is exacerbated by endemic corruption and poor leadership, and compounded by a lack of engagement at the community level on the part of both policy-makers and development practitioners. The outcome is that women living

¹ The Human Development Report (HDR, 1995) introduced a composite measures of gender disparities, and since then similar indices have been used to compare the progress made in different countries around the world. The Gender-related Development Index (GDI) and Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) addressed some of the shortcomings of earlier indices, and the 2010 Gender Inequality Index (GII) was complemented by the new Gender Development Index (GDI) in 2014. Other indices of note include the 2009 Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) and the 2004 Gender Equity Index (GEI) (UNDP, 2015). Measurements of gender inequality place emphasis on different priorities but have common themes, including empowerment in political, economic and decision-making power, political opportunities and participation in political decision-making, reproductive health and survival and educational attainment. However, development indices have been heavily criticized, including by Latouche (2009) who argues that all have a Western bias and therefore do not present an accurate picture.

² Sierra Leone has 146 Members of Parliament (MPs), of whom only 18 (12.33%) are women (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2018).

in these circumstances are forced to rely on their own resourcefulness as a method of survival.^{1.1} The Development Context

In 2013, Sierra Leone was ranked 177 out of 187 countries in the Human Development Index (HDI) (African Development Bank Group, 2013, p. 6), and by 2017 had fallen to 184 out of 189 countries (AfDB, 2018). This reflected a downturn in the state of health, education and income in the country³.

Country	Life expectancy	Prevalence of undernourishment	Infant mortality /1,000 live births	Population below int. pov. line (US\$2/day)
Sierra Leone	51.3 yrs.	22.3%	87.1	52.3%
Liberia	61.2 yrs.	31.9% (2016)	69.9	56.3%
Guinea	61.4 yrs.	18.3%	66.1	69.6% (2007)
Ivory Coast	56 yrs.	13.3%	68	29% (2008)

Table 1. Key development indicators within the Mano River Union (MNU) countries⁴
(African Statistical Yearbook, 2018)

In 2015, the total population of Sierra Leone was 7,092,113, with 45.8% aged between six and twenty-four years, and of those aged fifteen and over, 49% of had never attended school (SSL, 2015, pp. 8 & 11). Youth unemployment was estimated at 9.4% the same year (CIA Factbook, 2018), and the disaffected youth were considered to have been a principal catalyst that had contributed to unrest prior to the outbreak of the conflict (1991-2002), as well as acting as a recruitment source for rebel factions. Progress has been marginal in recent years, despite President Koroma's declaration on his re-election in 2012 that he would prioritise support for women. He promised to finance the reconstruction of the educational infrastructure and provide vocational training centres to improve skill levels. But the *Population and Housing Census Thematic Report on Education and Literacy* (Bangura, Kargbo & Wasswa Kabugo, 2017, p. 49) called for resources to be allocated to infrastructure, teacher training and materials, apprenticeships and vocational training for school drop-outs and those who had received some level of non-formal education, as well as provision of adult education. The persistent lack of these indicates that the previous President's 2012 pledge had not been upheld. In an address to the nation in 2018, the newly elected President Maada Bio launched 'Education for Development', a programme for free quality education that detailed a new structure and an array of scheduled reforms (GoSL, 2018).

³ According to the CIA Factbook (2018), in 2015 84.9% of the urban population and 47.8% of the rural population had access to improved water, 22.8% of the urban population and 6.9% of the rural population had access to improved sanitation, and literacy rates were 48.1% (male 58.7%, female 37.7%).

⁴ N.B. This table and all statistics in this thesis are based on most recent available figures, which accounts for the inconsistencies in dates of data.

Recent data suggests that these reforms are very necessary in order to address inequality in education and also in health outcomes. Literacy rates (2015) were an estimated 43.8% female and 59% male (SSL, 2015, p. 39). Of women aged 15-49, 50% have received no education, 23.3% of girls aged 15-19 are either mothers or are pregnant with their first child, and 86.1% of women have undergone female circumcision (FGM/C) (MICS, 2017, p. 79). Maternal mortality rates were estimated at 1,360/100,000 live births, neo-natal mortality at 20/1,000 live births, and under-five mortality at 94/1,000 live births (MICS, 2017). Despite persistent inequalities, there was a steep rise in the number of women who function as head of household following the war, but this was mainly due to male loss of life and men abandoning their families. These statistics and background gives some indication of why women are positioned as the 'silent majority'. But in this study, I argue that women's exclusion from an active role in public decision-making should not lead us to interpret them as passive. On the contrary, the indirect methods women employ when exerting agency within such a restrictive, patriarchal society is the focus of this study; I examine this process and I assess the positive influence women have within their communities.

1.2 Aims & Objectives

This thesis has two principal aims. First, I identify the multiple factors that contribute to Sierra Leonean women's low social status in order to gain a better understanding of the complexities of women's under-development. Second, I examine routes through which the status of women in Sierra Leone can be improved. The objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To identify the main historical, economic, social and cultural issues that obstruct women's and girls' progress.
2. To identify the factors that undermine the success of large-scale development programmes that seek to empower extremely poor women.
3. To make recommendations that can lead to resolution of the main issues obstructing women's progress.
4. To assess the potential of proposed routes of progression for women and how they may be integrated into future policy and programming.

At the core of this study is a collection of edited conversations with women, conducted in several communities in Sierra Leone over a period of four years (2011-2014). I refer to these groups of women as the 'silent majority', using the term to draw attention to the notable absence of input from women of low socio-economic status in public decision-making forums. My intention is to contribute to increasing awareness among policymakers and development practitioners regarding the true depths of deprivation among the marginalised, which I hope will act as a catalyst to promote positive change.

The leader of the Marimbo Water Women's Development Group in Kaningo, Freetown summed up the situation: "We simply want a better future for ourselves and our children. We're prepared to do whatever it takes." The extent of the challenges faced by women in Sierra Leone is reflected in the quotations below, but the statements do not reveal the underlying complexities relating to the issues which have been the focus of my research.

The low status of women is steeped in culture and tradition. In traditional Sierra Leonean society the wife and children are at the mercy of the family. Women have little control or influence over decision-making. Certain socio-cultural practices provide the leading causes of gender disparity and the inferior status of women as evidenced by such factors as high fertility rates, high infant and child mortality rates, high adult female illiteracy rates, exclusion of women from receiving certain services and instruments in rural areas such as land, extension services, credit and farm inputs and the disproportionate amount of the workload in agriculture (estimated at 60-80% allocated to women).

(TRC, 2004, p.8)

1.3 The Origins of this Study

I made my first visit to Sierra Leone in 2009, when I was invited by Professor Maurice Mitchell to accompany trainee architects attached to the London Metropolitan University (LMU) Architecture of Rapid Change and Scarce Resources (ARCSR) resource centre on a two-week fact-finding visit to Freetown and the provinces of Makeni and Kamaranka. Our brief was to assess the viability of potential locations in either the capital, Freetown, or in the north, and to set up a joint project that would involve ARCSR students working together with local workers to construct a community school. It was decided that it should be built in Kaningo, Lumley - a district of Freetown in dire need of schools. In 2010, I returned as a researcher employed by ARCSR to compile a social history charting the settlement and development of the district; essential background information to support the project. Between 2009 and 2012, I continued conduct research and fieldwork in Freetown for LMU, which allowed me to increase my knowledge of several urban communities and their origins.



Map 1. Sierra Leone (University of Texas, 2005)

My observations and background reading during this scoping exercise convinced me that primary research was needed to determine the true depths of the disadvantage and poverty suffered by women living in urban and rural communities that I had witnessed. I planned a detailed field study that I then undertook on return visits to Sierra Leone between 2011 and 2014, which subsequently became the source of data for this thesis. My aim was to produce a documented portrayal of women's lives that I intended to present in a series of interviews and conversations with women's organisations, women's networks, and women's groups and with individual women. This would reveal the degrees of agency women employed, would allow me to determine their influence, and find out, given their restricted circumstances, whether they were represented and active within the public forum. My intention was to document which resources they mobilised in order to circumvent economic, social and cultural restrictions.

During subsequent fieldtrips I observed stagnation, even deterioration in certain instances, in the socio-economic position of several communities. There was evidence of marginal improvement in others, notably where there was strong leadership and active women's groups who used ingenuity and resourcefulness to improve their circumstances, expand their livelihood options and educate their children. The majority of women and their families in rural areas continued to function at basic survival levels that typically allowed for only one meal in the evening after a full day's physical work. This was in spite of aid funding flowing into the country to finance education, healthcare and agriculture projects. For example, the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) allocated a total budget of £257,050,000 to Sierra Leone between 2011-2015, of which over £39 million was directed through multilateral channels (ICAI, 2014) that included UNICEF, UNFPA and the UNDP. Education received, £33.5 million, health received £62.2 million, water and sanitation £43 million, and £79.6 million was earmarked for governance and security (DFID 2012).

Map 2. Location of Freetown and Makeni (Keese, 2016)

The time I spent with women in Kaningo, Freetown, and Makeni in Bombali district (see Map 2) presented a picture of communities that were severely disadvantaged and who functioned outside of government programming. They were reliant on support they derived from within the community rather than backing from government health, education and welfare initiatives. In conversation with women in villages, neighbourhoods and settlements, and with members of women's networks and women's groups, as well as individual women I learned of their struggles to survive and to reconstruct their lives in the years since the civil war had ended in 2002. Through these interactions, common themes emerged: women were striving to improve their socio-economic situations for themselves, and for their families and their children - unsupported, they claimed, by international or state intervention. Most women and their families lacked access to basic health, educational or agricultural infrastructure. In rural districts, where there were few livelihood options other than farming, communities were heavily dependent on remuneration from seasonal agriculture. I learned that the position of women was exacerbated by patriarchal customs that consigned women and girls from a young age to the traditional roles of wife and mother, reinforcing gendered inequalities that rendered them vulnerable to high levels of violence which was commonplace (Denney & Ibrahim, 2012).

1.3 Framing the Discussion

Amartya Sen and his frequently cited Capabilities Approach proved useful in framing and guiding discussions at key stages during the evolution of this thesis. Sen argued that each person should have the freedom “to be and to do” and to lead a life of choice, and that each individual should be able to live the kind of life that, upon reflection, he/she has reason to value (Sen, 1999, p.18). Extreme poverty in Sierra Leone deprives the majority of underprivileged women and men their basic human rights as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN resolution 217A, 1948) and as set out by Sen⁵ (1997 & 2017). Basic human rights are denied not only to these groups, but also to all similarly disadvantaged populations worldwide. I stress that each woman in Sierra Leone who does not have access to adequate shelter, sanitation, clean water and healthcare and who has not had the opportunity to go to school suffers serious infringements of her human rights. I advance an argument in line with Nussbaum (2000), who asserted that women's freedom to utilise their capabilities to their full potential must be set within a robust political framework constructed by the government.

⁵ As Sen noted, “With careful design it is possible in theory and in practice for societies to decide what most people consider important to live a life well” (Sen, 1970, as cited in Hutton, 2017).

My research indicated this was not the case in Sierra Leone where women's progress was obstructed not only by custom and tradition but by a government that lacked commitment to implementation of programmes designed to instigate positive change. In this study I apply an intersectional lens that highlights women's overlapping identities. (Carbado, Crenshaw, Mays, Tomlinson, 2013). Intersectionality, has expanded from Crenshaw, (1989) and her examination of reasons for black women's marginalisation through history and power rooted in black feminism and critical race theory, (Yuval-Davis, 2006) to a global and nuanced inspection of law, sociology, education, history, psychology and political science all considered contributory factors in the marginalisation of women. Intersectionality serves as an aid to understanding multiple and incremental reasons for the marginalisation of participants in this study, see chapter 3. In my analysis I distinguish between the response of elite educated groups who advocate on behalf of women and those who are extremely poor and oppressed, affected by a number of social and political discriminations and disadvantages, whose voices are not heard. I suggest there are links in multiple levels of social injustice (I draw on a diverse range of societal groupings, tribal allegiances and age ranges to achieve a balance of data evidencing women's positioning and exposing commonalities in matters that affect women. I detail reasons for varied responses to the issues that in many instances have their foundations in intersectionality.

In the final chapter, I affirm that there are signs of progress in several communities where initiatives led by women are beginning to transform women's traditional roles. In line with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5, which proposes action to be taken to achieve gender equality, government plans and international funding, can, if fully implemented, eventually lead to gender transformation. Indications are that this can take place through collective actions that challenge the norm, and through contestation and negotiation by women's networks (see interviews in Chapter Five and Chapter Six) that operate from a woman-centred perspective (Moser, 2017; Kabeer, 1994).

1.4 Theoretical Foundation

I consider the relevance of feminist perspectives put forward by theorists including Marchand and Parpart (1995), Kabeer (1994), Parpart, Rai and Staudt (2002), Aggarwal (2002), Stromquist, (2002), Desai (2002), Nussbaum (2000), Cornwall (2005), Marchand (2002) and Shiva (2002) and the extent to which rudiments of these philosophies apply to the circumstances of women who took part in this study. I scrutinise the work of theorists and practitioners such as Rahnema (1997), Sachs (2010), Simmons (1997), Galeano (1997), Illich

(1970), Freire (1970), Escobar (1995), Latouche (2015), Estava and Prakash (2014), Foucault (1981), Ferguson (1994) and Mignolo (2012), as well as others who reject the mainstream development paradigm. Their various works propose alternatives with a preference for small-scale projects that are empathetic with the local context. I argue that elements of these concepts demonstrate compatibility with the situation 'on the ground' rather than continuation of large-scale development policies and practice that in the context of Sierra Leone fail to improve women's socio-economic position.

My research is informed broadly by an interpretivist paradigm which holds the theoretical belief that reality is socially constructed. I link this with ontological and epistemological concepts as I consider the lives and experiences of groups of women who have been forced to construct their unique reality (and individual interpretations of that reality) out of and amidst the chaos of displacement and trauma suffered during the civil war that took place between 1991 and 2002. I used interdisciplinary methodology to expand my knowledge of the social, political and cultural factors that influenced the lives of the participants. Collection and analysis of qualitative data through ethnographic participant interaction and observation was central to construction of the narrative in this study. I listened to women's views as a precursor to advocating routes of progression based on my data analysis that could improve development programme outcomes

I adapted elements of Grounded Theory (GT), originated by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and subsequently revised by Strauss (1987), Strauss and Corbin (1990), Corbin and Strauss (2008), Clarke (2005), Charmaz (2006), and Bryant and Charmaz (2007) as a framework that guided my research. Following this approach, I wrote and transcribed daily field diaries noting emerging themes and subsequently codes and set aside time for reflection. Adopting a multi-disciplinary approach was key to increasing my understanding of the reasons for women's low socio-economic status. The process facilitated the construction of an observational narrative that exposed disconnects in development that I came to view as being inherent within the development process. It enabled me, as my research progressed, to construct a theory that could offer potential routes of progression.

I employed triangulation of data that led to the gradual emergence of arguments and, subsequently, my theory. In summary, I applied a cross-disciplinary approach rooted in elements of GT to produce a predominantly ethnographic, observational study. The application of my selected methodological framework gave me the scope to examine fresh perspectives directed principally by context.

1.5 My Positionality

I felt an affinity with Kapuscinski (2002), the respected Polish foreign correspondent who never lost sight of his position as the ‘outsider’ during the many years he spent reporting on African politics. I found my positionality presented many challenges. My remit as researcher was to grasp the underlying complexities of the vernacular space - the village, or the community, a microcosm of unfamiliar signs and symbols, of different ways of being, doing and talking. In the process of doing so I observed different belief systems, customs and traditions that served as a common language that represented and decoded the world in its particular way (Rahnema & Bawtree, 1997, p. 113). My undertaking was to observe, listen and record the views of respondents while minimising my influence on outcomes. I was acutely aware of my positioning in relation to the social, political and economic context of participants, the delicate nature of the relationship between researcher and participant and the power dynamic, which was often unequal (Charlton, Myers & Sharpless, 2007, p. 141-145).

My positioning, my beliefs, my political stance, cultural background, gender, race, class, socio-economic status, educational background combined with my Western biases and privileges, my Eurocentric perspective and preconceptions juxtaposed against a backdrop of locally-lived experiences rendered me vulnerable to excessive biases. However, I counter the negative traits I identify with myself as researcher with reference to Moser who recognises the importance of the individual’s personality in shaping the research process and product. I identify with Moser who, while she does not underestimate the challenges of culture, language and education, highlights the importance of personality the use of social skills, emotional responses and interests in local events as positive contributions in the research process (Moser, 2008, p. 383-392). My research practice involved self-scrutiny, awareness of the relationship between myself the researcher and the ‘other’, the need for constant reflection on how I related to local people (Bourke, 2014, 1-9). In conclusion I propose my positionality can be viewed as having both positive and negative features.

I penetrated layers of social and economic structures but I cannot claim to have constructed absolute truths nor can I offer definitive answers to the complex social and economic problems discussed in this thesis. My preconceptions were tested when I asked women from different cultures and backgrounds to mine to speak about their lives. I was forced to critically evaluate the participant’s positioning, my own status both in Sierra Leone and to reconsider my standing within Western society. Shostak (2000) shared the story of Nisa, a woman whose life was far removed from her own: in the process of recounting Nisa’s experiences, Shostak was

confronted by doubts about her own standing as a woman in Western society. I found parallels between Shostak's position and mine during this research project. I took guidance and advice from local professionals and individuals, mitigating some but not all of the pitfalls that were likely to arise due to my superficial knowledge of local traditions, customs and languages.

Throughout the entire process I was aware that I was only one step closer to understanding the local realities of the socio-economic status of women and girls. I noted a lack of trust particularly during my first visit to Freetown and the provinces a trip in 2009 (not connected to this thesis) when Sierra Leone was considered a fragile state. I attribute this to a pressing need to establish security that resulted in intimidating and overly officious policing methods. There were frequent police checkpoints staffed by plain-clothes 'secret police' who would demand a payment, especially in rural districts. Suspicion of the stranger was understandable in such circumstances where survival was at the forefront of people's minds: the individual's focus was on their own safety and that of their immediate family. Mistrust persisted although to a lesser degree during field trips I conducted between 2011 and 2014. While I was able to penetrate layers of social and economic structures, I remained alert to the fact that my Western-biases, perceptions and philosophies and my limited understanding of the vernacular were distinct disadvantages.

In the course of my research I developed a network of contacts across different strata of society - government ministers, officials, heads of international and national organisations as well as local representatives and community members who offered a spectrum of social and economic material which I could cross-reference and verify as my enquiry progressed. My links with community workers who were familiar with local populations to some extent guarded against the risk of misinterpretation, as did the rapport I cultivated with women's groups and local people. Nevertheless, it was a slow process, it took time to establish trust and required follow-up visits to strengthen relationships until I reached a point at which women were forthcoming and open in conversations but I was cognisant that participants would more than likely have their own agendas.

1.6 Ethical Considerations

I was granted ethical approval by the University of Portsmouth after meeting to explain my ethical approach which required to adapt from guidelines laid out by the Royal Anthropological Institution and the Institution of Social Anthropologists to suit circumstances in Sierra Leone where many participants would be illiterate. My ethical practice was consistent throughout

periods of fieldwork when I met with groups and individuals. First I introduced myself then I gave a clear explanation of the purpose of my visit, I explained what I was doing and why, and what I aimed to achieve and I asked if on that basis members of the group were willing to participate. I received a verbal agreement from each person prior to their inclusion. I applied the same approach when I engaged with male or female students and youth typically between fifteen and nineteen years (youth in Sierra Leone is considered from 15 to 35). My interactions with young people were in group discussions in which individuals within the group would volunteer to speak. Protocol to comply with requirements of government officials, members of international Non-governmental Organisations (INGOs), and international agencies and organisations required that first I delivered a letter of introduction, followed by a call to confirm the individual's inclusion as a participant. Each individual participant had complete choice throughout the entire process of 'being a participant'. Anonymity and confidentiality of participants was protected by numbering interviews, names are pseudonyms. If requested I confirmed the participant's inclusion in my thesis after an interview.

1.7 Fieldwork

My plan was to conduct research in environments that I could access and that would be comparable to each other. This would allow me to make observations and note contrasts. I chose Kaningo, a district within Freetown, as an example of a place (one of many) that despite being located in the capital city was extremely poorly served by basic government health, education and social facilities. For comparison I then selected the northern city of Makeni, which had been a rebel stronghold during the conflict and had been particularly badly affected by it, and rural settlements in the northern district of Bombali that were more remote and had even less available resources. The various field sites allowed me to compare and triangulate data collected regarding the various challenges that women face in their daily lives in each of the three locations.

I began the project by meeting with the director of the department of social studies at Milton Margai College (MM) in Freetown who agreed to my request to employ four final year social work students to accompany me on all urban field visits. The students planned to write up their findings as a project that would be a part of their coursework. This gave the students practical experience relevant to their degree course and, through their local knowledge, they added an extra dimension to my understanding of life in urban communities. The time I could spend travelling out of Freetown to the northern provinces was limited by the high cost of vehicle

hire, fuel, accommodation and daily subsistence. I employed an ex-UN driver who was accustomed to navigating trips in adverse conditions, along with a field worker linked to the UNICEF national office in Freetown who was responsible for implementing WASH public health programmes and educational initiatives and had lived in the district for five years, both of whom proved to be invaluable sources of local knowledge. I provided each assistant with food and accommodation for the duration of the fieldtrips which lasted for several days.

Travel was hazardous, especially in the rains (the wet season), due to poor infrastructure outside the capital, which apparently de-incentivised Freetown-based INGOs and NGOs from visiting rural districts to monitor projects. This was evident in their light presence outside Freetown and was confirmed by rural community members and local community workers who said they seldom met with staff from organisations other than when they made periodic, short trips to compile essential reports that they used to inform policy decisions. In such situations, it is likely that visits would be limited to easily accessible settlements and would be conducted in the dry season when travel was far easier, while marginal communities in remote areas would be neglected, leaving their true situation unreported (De Waal, 1997; Chabal & Daloz, 1999).

When I journeyed north, I recruited experienced community workers who had lived in the villages and settlements for periods of time. I first made contact with them during my scoping trip on behalf of LMU prior to commencement of this project. I planned to gather data from participants in Makeni, the principal city in the northern province of Bombali, where communities had been forced to co-exist with rebel forces who had been embedded for prolonged periods during the conflict (1991-2002). I produced case studies from research I carried out in Makeni that portrayed extreme degrees of violence and deprivation that had become normalised as part of women's and girls' lives. Finally, I visited outlying rural settlements in Kamaranka and the surrounding district, located in Bombali towards the Guinea border, during which I was accompanied by the same research assistant. I observed women's living conditions in the rural environment, and in recounting their stories women identified core issues that had a negative impact on them and their families. Collecting and comparing data in the three locations enabled me to make first-hand observations and identify some of the general and specific issues that effectively obstructed women's progress. Only once I had completed fieldwork and the analysis of my data collection was I then in a position to comment on the situation and begin the search for potential solutions.

Data source	Type of data	Data Analysis
Government departments and government officials	Government documents and reports Policy and programme documents Interviews Discussion (recorded in field notes)	Analysis of factual material, current discourse and debate
INGOs, NGOs, CBOs officials and staff . Semi-structured and guided interviews with senior government officials	Group and individual interviews and discussions (recorded in field notes)	Content analysis through transcription, discussion, reflection, memoing and thematic coding leading to evolution of theory
Village and community participants.	Interviews, life histories, focus group discussions, open-ended data, semi-structured interviews, one-to-one informal interviews (recorded in field notes)	Content analysis through transcription, discussion, reflection, thematic coding and memoing
National press	Articles on topical political and economic issues and on local issues	Comparative analysis
Local radio	Radio programmes, phone-ins, news, reports, music (rapping on current topics.)	Analysis of political, economic and social topics

Table 2. Source of data, type of data and method of data analysis.

First during scoping trips and then during subsequent field trips my research methodology was focused on data gathering, dissemination, analysis and review. I produced detailed field notes and compiled field diaries, which I referred to regularly, using them as guidance and sources of reflection. I practised daily memoing, recording thoughts and ideas relating to the day's findings during field visits then I logged the data and verified it as far as possible with community workers. Next, I identified and sorted recurring key words and then, following the principles of thematic coding, I placed data into separate categories. I applied a cross-disciplinary approach incorporating elements of ethnography. This interpretivist approach supported my observations and interactions with participants, which increased my understanding of the participant's world. I combined these methods with aspects of grounded theory, an entire structure that produced a comprehensive record of my field studies. I record in subsequent chapters the process that culminated in the formulation of my theory.

I conducted my research as follows. On arrival I would meet with the local community worker and brief him on my research objectives. He would then contact chiefs and elders to ascertain if and when a visit could be scheduled. Each morning I would again meet with the community

worker to agree the day's schedule. We would then start the day's field visits. In each village we would be greeted in the local manner with jubilant singing and dancing, and on several occasions, I was honoured with the gift of a (live) chicken. Once I was presented with two chickens!⁶ This ceremony was followed by introductory meetings with the whole village led by chiefs, elders and community leaders in order to conform to local protocols. Community project supervisors acted as interpreters when communication was in local languages. I started each meeting with an explanation of who I was and where I was from; I outlined the purpose of my research and ascertained whether the members of the group were willing participants. This was followed by a gathering of community members, the purpose of which was for me to gather data on the social and economic position of the groups, the environment, geography and layout of each settlement, the community's origins, ethnicity, culture and traditions, their access to government services such as schools, hospitals and health clinics, agricultural/environmental programmes or clean water, and to gain an indication of livelihood opportunities and activities.

The meetings provided a forum for general discussion and the exchange and sharing of information and allowed me to assess the socio-economic positioning of the settlement in an informal way. This initial encounter laid the groundwork that established my relationship with the group and proved an integral element of an important trust-building exercise. Next, I moved on to a general meeting with women living in the community and I then met with individual women's groups who presented themselves as interested participants. This was followed by a group discussion and that led into a smaller meeting with approximately six women with whom I then conducted one-to-one interviews. This methodology laid the groundwork for progressively more relaxed exchanges conducive to drawing out relevant information of a more personal nature. I found that local people relaxed and interacted in an informal manner with both me and the research assistant. They knew him well and had a good relationship with him. I employed similar methods in the urban environment, and whenever it was possible I preferred a less formal structure in meetings with senior bureaucrats who were more forthcoming in their conversation when I was accompanied by Sierra Leonean assistants. Visits I made alone were more formal and it was more difficult to elicit information other than the official view. On more than one occasion it was presumed that I had arrived with a pre-established agenda (as was my experience in the case recorded in Chapter Five, Interview C14).

⁶ A gift of a chicken was a great honour. Villages I visited often did not have sufficient food. We gave the chickens to a cook who took them off in her basket and produced the delicious result the following evening, much to the enjoyment of the driver and research assistant.

Type of meeting	Number of Participants
Focus group	30-50 women and men
Informal group discussion	30-50 women and men
Informal conversation	10-15 women some men
Semi-structured interview	6-9 women and men
Interview	4-6 women and men
Individual interview	One-to-one x 6

Table 3. Summary of meetings and participants

As noted earlier, outside Freetown I recruited experienced Sierra Leonean community workers who accompanied me to meetings in urban and rural, formal and non-formal environments. They were familiar with the relevant districts and communities and were able to provide basic background information as well as facilitating the meetings. In Freetown, I was assisted each day by a team of four trainee researchers from a local community college. I planned the project together with the head of department so that the social work students would gain practical experience in fieldwork. The intention was that the student researchers would write up the project and a record of our field visits as part of a course assessment (see Chapter Six).

On every field visit, each day concluded with a debrief with the community worker. This allowed for the accuracy of my notes to be checked, and was an important time for clarifying material, and for the community worker to give me any relevant details about local traditions and cultural practices that had come to light during the course of the day's investigations. Preparations would then be made for the following day's fieldwork taking into account the results of the day's data collection.

1.8 Originality & Contribution of Research

As with any piece of research, I am mindful that this study has numerous limitations. One principal shortcoming is that it covers a fixed period between 2011 and 2014 and is set against the backdrop of ongoing turbulence caused by uneven socio-economic development in Sierra Leone. Major events took place during this period that had a major impact on the country's economy: the crash in commodity prices (2014); the Ebola virus disease (EVD) outbreak (2014-2015) and the impact of the Freetown mudslide (2017). I acknowledge that my alignment with NGOs and community workers coloured the information my informants shared with me. Community workers and those who employ them have access to funds and have a certain influence, and participants realise this and may prefer not to be overly critical of the work of NGOs. I was aware that this was one among several potential obstacles in my attempt

to gain a balanced view. It could influence my evaluation of their role in the delivery of women's empowerment projects and of the effectiveness of NGOs and community workers in general. I was also alert to additional shortcomings regarding my position as an outsider, including my limited knowledge of the nuances of local culture, traditions and customs, and I was also challenged linguistically when local languages predominated. In order to make best use of my research time, I used observation, listening, interaction, discussion and conversation. Together these activities contributed to my objectivity; when they became exposed, I noted the dysfunctions and disparities in development and between development actors. It brought into focus the reasons why development interventions had failed to reach marginalised women.

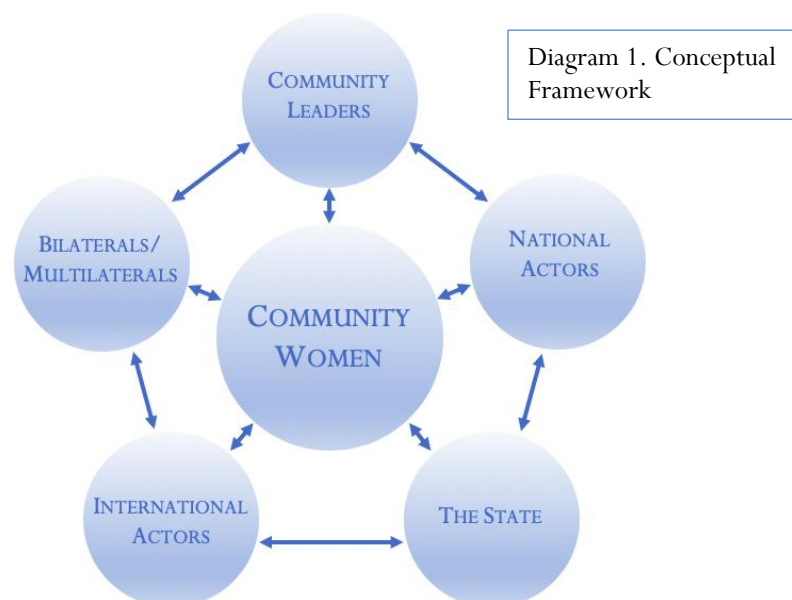
Community workers who accompanied me on field visits were familiar with local languages, customs and practices and guided me with regard to acceptable social manners. They explained and interpreted, and they provided invaluable daily feedback in order to minimise the risk of my misinterpreting situations or of my intentions being misconstrued. The value of this study, I believe, lies in the records I have made of the ways in which participants construct their life stories. My intention is for these accounts come to the attention of policy makers and development practitioners, and that this in turn will encourage a positive shift in future development policy that will improve women's status. The originality of my work is twofold. Firstly, I offer primary data that presents fresh perspectives and gives insight into women's lives. It focuses on challenges they face and the resources they draw upon. Women themselves during the process of telling their stories articulated evidence of inconsistencies in the structure and hierarchy of development practice. Similar themes were also repeated in the data collected across the broader spectrum of participants, including by senior government and INGO officials (albeit expressed in different terms), thus confirming flaws in structure and implementation of national and international development operations.

Though historical, economic, anthropological and sociological material that details the challenges faced in Sierra Leone is available, it does not appear to have been adopted into policy that contributes to an improvement in the circumstances of the poor. This is in spite of the country being the focus of large-scale funding by DFID, the UN, USAID and other agencies. This research is intended to encourage the construction of bridges between disenfranchised women and key development actors, because increasing their understanding of people's experiences and the issues they endure will contribute to formulating appropriate responses. Dialogue must be created between the different layers of bureaucracy as the first step in what will be a lengthy process to reverse the present situation and nurture a move towards women's

equality and empowerment. In this thesis I record conversations with women and girls who detail the real challenges they face day-to-day, and in doing so render women's voices audible. This is a departure from the rhetoric of mainstream development policy and practice that fails to make a positive impact on their lives. Understanding the true nature of the issues is a prerequisite to problem analysis and resolution. My case studies highlight women's inherent capabilities and survival skills and also detail the methods they employ to achieve positive transformation in their lives.

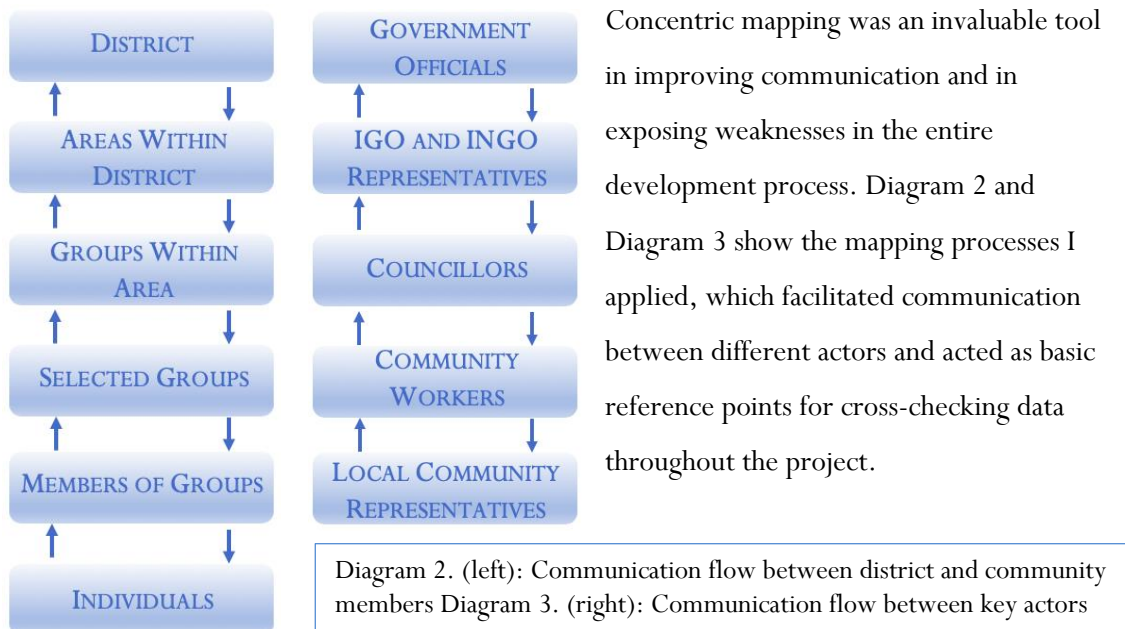
In order to achieve a balanced critique in this thesis, I examine the roles of different actors and stakeholders who share the responsibility for delivering development projects. The results of my data collection and analysis indicate discrepancies in responses to community development exacerbated by weaknesses in programme systems and serious deficiencies in operational linkages and monitoring systems. This is referenced in reports produced by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO, 2014) and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2008), which presents a critical analysis of the initiative impact.

1.9 Conceptual framework



The intention of the revised development structures I propose is that all actors collaborate in the best interests of the disadvantaged. The conceptual framework moves from a hierarchal structure to propose a lateral model that re-positions women at the centre of the development process (Diagram 1, above). This is in contrast to the existing hierarchical structure of key

actors at the district and community levels (Diagram 2, below left) and in bureaucratic systems at the national level (Diagram 3, below right). It opens multi-directional channels of communication and interaction that I propose have the potential to open routes towards sustainable development, and in centring women indicates the importance of their relationship with key actors that is at the core of my research design and structure.



1.10 Thesis Structure

In Chapter Two I set out the theoretical framework that underpins this thesis. I examine the influence of development-related jargon, which I argue obstructs debate and progression of development initiatives. I consider the implications of agency, governance and corruption and how these issues affect social and economic progress. I explore alternatives to mainstream development through the lens of post-development theorists, proponents of paradigms which I believe demonstrate the potential to support progress towards women's equality and empowerment. I consider these concepts to be preferable options to the mainstream neo-liberal approach. I assess the potential of these paradigms to address failures in development practice through integrating women's agency and social and cultural capital, and respect for and application of women's indigenous skills and knowledge. I argue that these untapped resources are key to improving outcomes of development initiatives. In particular, I reference post-development and transitional discourses in the works of (Arturo Escobar, 2011, 2015, 2016) (Majid Rahnema, 1997, 2010), (Serge Latouche, 2004, 2009) and others who argue that the large-scale initiatives based on Western models and favoured by UN agencies are unworkable in

the local context because they are unaware of the real needs and priorities of the groups they are intended to support.

In Chapter Three I begin by examining the interweaving of history, culture and tradition that I propose has contributed to women's inequality in Sierra Leone. I reflect on claims that women actually collude in practices and conditions that leave them excluded and impoverished. The accounts recorded and edited reveal that cultural practices, rituals and procedures are ingrained in women's psyches; they shape ways in which women perceive and interact with the world they inhabit. For example, in Sierra Leone female genital mutilation (FGM) is widespread, with an estimated 89.6% of women aged between 15 and 49 years having been cut (IDC, 2014). FGM delineates women's position in society and forces women to maintain a traditional lifestyle that endorses subjugation and social inferiority. In this chapter I explore the reasons why women continue to observe practices that are detrimental to them and that contribute to maintaining their position of subjugation. I note, however, that there is growing resistance to these practices among the younger generation.

Chapter Four examines education and learning using empirical evidence produced during my fieldwork, which I address with reference to relevant reports and documentation. I discuss traditional learning methods and I consider the long-term disruption to education caused by colonialism and its legacy, which is retained to a large extent in a British-based curriculum. I argue that a complete revision of the educational structure and the entire focus and content of the syllabus is necessary. I assert the importance of the re-instatement of African culture and tradition and argue that education must respond to the requirements of today's students. I examine basic attitudes towards the education of women and girls, and I consider the obstacles they face in accessing education. I advocate for further and ongoing research to be carried out to ensure that education leads to student enfranchisement, the transformation of student lives, and the realisation of student aspirations. The data collected and my analysis of it provide evidence that government programmes in the education sector have so far been defective and corrupt and, as such, they have failed to deliver on the goals set out in national education initiatives.

In Chapter Five I present an analysis of data from interviews with UN agencies, senior government officials, INGOs, NGOs, and women's networks, associations and advocacy groups, which together provides insights into cross-sectoral official perspectives. Based on the results of my data collection, I assert that disconnections obstruct developmental progress. I critique the role of UN agencies using my theoretical framework as a foundation from which to

challenge the Western biases that are inherent in the structuring and implementation of large-scale development programmes. My research confirms that women's progress is frustrated across different societal strata as well as by culture and tradition (see also, Chapter Three).

In Chapter Six I present the data gathered in conversations with women in which they describe their daily existence. Women discuss aspects of their lives that confirm that they are outside the reach of government initiatives and formal support systems. This links back to data presented in Chapter Five that draws attention to the failure of state level policymakers and development practitioners (through lack of contextual knowledge) to take action that will reverse the scale and nature of deprivation that affects women. Focus groups, discussion, conversations and open-ended interviews cover broad-ranging topics that negatively affect the lives of women and their families. Women articulate frustration at the lack of government support they receive, which forces them to function at minimum survival levels, and they discussed their aspirations, and how they set up innovative, small-scale schemes to increase livelihood opportunities; a practical example of women's agency in extreme adversity.

In Chapter Seven I set-out alternative routes of progression. I place them in a Contextual Development (CD) framework and assert that youth play a pivotal role in advancing socio-economic development, but that this is reliant on a voluntary reduction of the power of chiefs, elders and community leaders. I present practical guidelines for the application of CD that I recommend should be integrated into development policy and practice in order to improve outcomes. I draw links between small-scale initiatives and the core principles of the post-development paradigms outlined in Chapter Two, and from this make the recommendation that, as part of a move towards CD, these methods should be incorporated into comprehensively revised development structures that demonstrate potential to alleviate poverty and to improve the status of women. I observe an organic process that is already underway in urban and rural neighbourhoods and affirm that this represents an affirmative route of progress. I note that small-scale projects referenced in Chapters Five and Six, though in their early stages, are proving capable of sustaining communities. I stress the need to work towards a shift in community power structures that is based on collective community involvement, and I advocate for tighter monitoring of funding that has been dedicated to community projects. Doing so will contribute to eradicating the misappropriation of monies by dominant groups. I recommend changes that will reduce the incidence of cultural practices that are harmful to women, and finally, I summarise my key findings in support of my claim that development in its current guise, is failing to lift women out of poverty and improve their

status. I recap the results of the data that expose underlying factors that contribute to the obstruction of women's socio-economic progress. Primary research, I argue, is the first and most important step that has to be taken prior to introducing reforms that seek to improve development outcomes.

To conclude, I offer recommendations that challenge the status quo of a development practice that favours the language of empowerment and participation yet struggles to translate these concepts into meaningful action. I present my overarching theory, which proposes alternative routes of progression for women and girls. I believe this structure has the potential to support Sierra Leonean women and to take them forward. It can also be applied to women who in similar situations in countries in the MANO river group (Liberia, Guinea, Cote d'Ivoire) and elsewhere in their drive towards equality and empowerment. This study is intended to present evidence of disparities in development programming and encourage dialogue between bureaucrats and communities. Critical appraisal that arises from this conversation will lead to revisions in thinking and approaches to development programming.

1.11 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have set out the purpose of my research, which is to determine why, in spite of a sustained financial and programme response to support the Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL) with resources coming from donors including DFID, USAID, the UN Country Team (UNCT) and the European Union, there is so little improvement in the socio-economic status of women in the country. While my argument may resonate with previous studies, I contend that its strength lies in its particular focus on primary data and direct links I make between data and my theoretical framework, which evaluates post-development theories that bear direct relevance to improving the position of women in Sierra Leone. The purpose of this thesis is to open-up and focus debate, take it forward, and encourage moves towards enacting potential solutions to development problems.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In the 1970's my dreams were not big enough. I was looking at *equality* not *transformation*... now they have become bigger and it is even more important than before to make a society in which the paradigm is a circle not a pyramid, in which we understand we are linked not ranked [Emphasis added].

(Steinem, 2016, quoted by Moser, 2016, p. 222)

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I present an overview of the different theoretical contributions that have assisted in the construction of my critical analysis. I refer to theorists, economists, and post-development scholars whose research and practices reject conventional Western development models. The theorists I discuss renounce the core presumption that is embedded in neo-liberalism: that it is possible to achieve continuous and equitable economic growth. Latouche (2015), Estava (2014), Gudynas (2011), Escobar (2015) and Illich (2018) - critics of conventional development policies - argue against perpetuating the current system that supports the type of neo-liberal policies and programmes funded and favoured by the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) that repeatedly fail to improve the position of the poor and marginalised. They assert that the language used in national programmes funded by international agencies does not accurately describe actual circumstances, and that it is deliberately misleading, with ulterior motives that are far reaching (see e.g., Escobar, 1995; 2011; Rahnema, 1997; Sachs, 2010). This resonates with my assertion that progress will continue to be obstructed as long as context continues to be overlooked in the development debate.

The work I refer to provides fresh perspectives on the unresolved issues investigated in this study. I consider these propositions to be integral to this research and draw on them in response to results of data collection and analysis. They offer insight into the reasons for the failure of conventional development programmes and advance the debate towards proposing alternative routes to resolving the development issues that affect women in Sierra Leone. I present a critique of the language of development, and an evaluation of the discourses that exert a negative influence on programming. I appraise the views of key theorists and social scientists who are critical of mainstream development and consider the role of feminism and how and where it is positioned within the post-development debate. I conclude by providing a review of key post-development theories and recapping the relevance of the concepts in my theoretical framework, giving an explanation of how they can advance research.

2.2 The Language of Development

The notion of ‘under-development’, a term introduced by U.S. President Truman in his inaugural speech in 1949 gave legitimacy to a broad spectrum of policies and activities including foreign investment, lowering or raising trade barriers, well-digging, literacy campaigns and much more, by suggesting that they would lead to an improvement in the circumstances of poor people. During the Cold War era, global divisions became increasingly pronounced. The Global North (the ‘First’ or ‘Developed’ World; the colonisers) became synonymous with economic development and industrialisation: 25% of the world’s population lived there earning 80% of global income. Meanwhile in the Global South (the ‘Third’ or ‘Undeveloped’ World; the previously colonised), home to 75% of the world’s population, earned 20% of global income. These countries became increasingly dependent on international aid as touted in the agendas of aid agencies, and it is against this backdrop that interpretations of development terminology, its influence on the development process and how they translate into the local context, must be considered.

As development became integrated into international policy, the associated language of development entered common use. Terms such as ‘empowerment’, ‘poverty’, ‘rights-based’, ‘corruption’, ‘governance’, ‘transparency’, ‘capacity-building’, ‘sustainability’, ‘accountability’, ‘gender’, ‘advocacy’, ‘transformation’ ‘participation’ - to name but a few - were adopted by policy-makers and practitioners who applied them to a range of different situations by way of explanation or justification for actions and results. Jargon repeated in this manner creates obfuscation and abstraction from real issues. It effectively distances policy makers and practitioners from reality (Brock & Cornwall, 2005). This in turn fosters a political climate in which avoiding or denying responsibility is not only accepted but becomes the norm. Overuse of terminology leads to a restriction in the diversity in debate. It fixes the parameters of the development discourse, thus leading to limitations in policy and programme design innovation, methodology and practice which encourages negative initiative outcomes (Cornwall & Eade, 2010; Escobar, 1995; 2015 and Foucault, cited in Mills, 2003).

Modern jargon uses stereotype words, like children use Lego toy pieces. Like Lego pieces the words fit arbitrarily together and support the most fanciful constructions. They have no content but do serve a function. As these words are separate from any context, they are ideal for manipulative purposes. ‘Participation’ belongs to this category of words.

(Rahnema, 2010, p. 127)

Rahnema (1998, p.123) states that jargon is insidious, expressions can be fabricated; in other words, made up, and used to underpin the continuation of the neo-liberal model with a view to creating programmed illusions and further 'needs'. For example, terms such as 'sustainable' or 'bottom-up' development, 'full employment', and 'income generating projects', directly or indirectly inculcate in the minds of the 'underdeveloped' their existential and historical inferiority. In the same text, Rahnema also criticises funders and development agencies for their practice of endorsing the non-local 'expert' advice that they employ rather than recognising the value of local economic visibility and viability.

Language profoundly influences the manner in which we interpret a situation. So, the repetitive use of particular terms can be harmful on different levels: it can limit debate which is rendered irrelevant unless it is adapted to suit the changing framework of society, it can subvert the structure of programmes and policy, and, as noted, if it is not adapted it becomes irrelevant in the local context. I contend that terminology can be instrumental in perpetuating systems and practices that obstruct the evolution of creative solutions to development issues. As Rahnema puts it:

The language of development is pseudo-scientific, technocratic and expert-based composed of words that are ambiguous, confusing and manipulative, particularly to local people: 'economic growth', 'reducing the gap', 'GNP', 'macro-economy', 'eco-science', 'ecosystem', 'cost-effective', 'priorities'

(Rahnema, 1997, p.123)

Foucault contends that discourse should be seen as a system that not only structures the way we perceive reality but as one that constrains our perceptions. He refers to authorised discourse in the hands of experts that functions within prescribed rules (Foucault cited by Mills, 2004, p.55 - 61), which I assert applies to development (and political) discourse that is structured within a strict linguistic framework.

This links with my contention that the development debate strongly influences ideas and policies through the constant use and affirmation of acceptable words, phrases and terms. I

extend this criticism to international development and the terminology frequently used in policy, debate, documentation and practice. Overuse of current development buzzwords can lead to terms becoming abstract, which can detach the actual development process from real meaning (see e.g., Brock & Cornwall, 2005 & 2012). I extend this critique to initiatives designed to draw in and be inclusive of the extremely disadvantaged. In particular, the terms 'participation' and 'participatory', first introduced into the development lexicon in the late

1950's, that became important in development as it became evident that 'top down' approaches were failing to lift people out of poverty. Thus, policy makers and development practitioners turned to participation and participatory methods as palliative solutions that they believed were capable of delivering development (Rahnema, 2010). Escobar observed that participatory or local-level planning was often understood not in terms of popular power that people could exercise, but instead it was more often considered the responsibility of the development institution to solve the bureaucratic problem (Escobar, 2010). This highlights, as Escobar notes, the issue of how participation is open to subversion by local people who may regard it as a way to deny responsibility, waiting instead for others to 'fix it': a process that I contend is exacerbated by the abstraction created by the constant use of development jargon. In this scenario I propose that denial of responsibility infiltrates each level of the bureaucratic hierarchy, as I discuss in more detail later (see Chapter Five). Cornwall takes this argument further claiming that policies depend on a measure of ambiguity, and "buzzwords aid this process by providing concepts that can float free of concrete referents to be filled with meaning by their users" (Cornwall, 2007, p. 472). I propose that the language of development creates an imagined reality that bears little resemblance to the truth. It creates an illusory definition of what it means to be under-developed, defining the supposed needs of those positioned in that category, and proposes solutions that are also likely to be illusory. There is a blurring between theory and practice, an assumed homogeneity that connects development practice to theoretical beliefs that are not factually supported (Lazreg, 2005, p. 67-80). As Parpart states:

The relevance of any theoretical approach or perspective hinges upon its practical utility in providing viable guidelines in the search for answers to practical problems of human coexistence and development.

(Parpart, 1995, p.133)

In line with the above quotation, I assert that answers to practical problems are reliant not only on practical utility, but also on context.

2.3 Interpretations of Empowerment

In the 1990's 'empowerment' was broadly prescribed as the antidote to women's under-development, referred to by Cornwall and Eade (2012) as the 'Women's Empowerment Approach'. Charlier and Caubergs (2007, p. 11) stated that empowerment operates on two levels: individual - in relation to its capacity for personal change, and collective - in relation to political and social change. This framework was then used to analyse each category and provide a step-by-step methodological approach that offers an impact assessment of power structures in

selected communities (in the Congo, Niger, Guinea and the Bolivian Andes) (Charlier & Caubergs, 2007). Parpart, Rai and Staudt, (2002, referencing Rowlands, 1998) express similar sentiments, stating that empowerment includes: “individual conscientisation (power within); as well as the ability to work collectively which can lead to politicised *power with*, which provides the *power* to bring about change.” The writers also assert that empowerment takes place through collective action, but they caution that power structures either enable or constrain action. Interpretations of empowerment are innumerable. Each definition must be analysed for its appropriateness to be applied within the given political, economic and cultural context, (Parpart, Rai & Staudt, 2002, ch. 1). Mama, (2005) notes that a range of African feminist writers declare feminism is misplaced in the African context. She proposes that terms such as “motherism” and “womanism” are more apposite, they demonstrate commitment to the survival of women. Ogundipe (2005) identifies all African women as having multiple identities enmeshed in the individual that evolve over time. These perspectives recognise the need for contextual entry points to gender in Sierra Leone that challenge the intersectionality of the multiple forms of subjugation endured by participants.

What, then, might empowerment mean to a woman in Sierra Leone: how does it fit across different strata in society? For example, empowerment at survival level must enable disadvantaged groups to access minimum basic needs - adequate shelter, sanitation, clean water, food security, healthcare and education. Empowerment at each level of sophistication (however minimal) will translate into increased choice, autonomy and control over the basic circumstances that have an impact on daily life, such as access to education, healthcare and livelihood options. In my observation, members of elite groups with greater choice, autonomy and freedom prescribed solutions to development issues that they were aware of, but that were distanced from the realities of hardship faced by communities. Here, I move on to examine ‘empowerment’ and some of its many interpretations, which I contend should be scrutinised in context, that is to say, according to the group or individual’s geographic, political and socio-economic position.

Parpart, Rai and Staudt (2002, ch. 1), influenced by Kabeer (1999) state that, “empowerment at a local level is integral to women’s progress towards equality.” They add the caveat that empowerment cannot be detached from a national and global context. In other words, the transformation of a woman’s life cannot be viewed in isolation from the wider national and international policy and programme structure. Several basic principles underpin Parpart, Rai and Staudt’s premise in which they identify basic challenges that face women in their journey

towards empowerment. Notably, understanding and facilitating women's empowerment requires a nuanced analysis of power and an examination of structure and agency at all levels of society, and the process of empowerment of marginalised women (and men) within broad political and economic structures is profoundly influenced by experiences, challenges and the subversion of power:

Empowerment must be analysed in global and national as well as local terms, even the most marginalised are affected by global and national forces. [...] Empowerment should be seen as much a process as an outcome. [...] both the process and the supposed outcomes [are] untidy and unpredictable rather than linear, inevitable and easily understood.

(Parpart, Rai & Staudt, 2002, ch. 1)

Malhotra and Schuler state in relation to empowerment that the process focuses on change towards greater equality or greater freedom of choice and action, and they introduce agency as the second distinguishing feature of empowerment. Agency, they assert, is reliant on women as significant actors (rather than merely beneficiaries) in the process of change that will result in empowerment (Malhotra & Schuler, 2005, p.72-73). They regard women's participation and inclusion in the wider social and economic spheres as integral to agency. Empowerment in terms of process and agency can be understood as "an expansion of freedom of choice and action to shape one's life" (Narayan-Parker, 2002, xviii). Kabeer also states that, "empowerment involves an expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied them" (Kabeer, 1999, p.437). Women, however poor, who have an experiential understanding of poverty must be regarded as active agents of change rather than reliance being placed upon outsiders who have none. Empowerment as defined through process and agency is directly applicable to the groups of women who participated in this study.

As Cornwall and Eade (2010) note, empowerment, as with numerous terms adopted in development, is overused to the extent that it is rendered devoid of its original meaning⁷. Many definitions and attempts to produce practical models of empowerment are situated outside of any development paradigm that relates to disadvantaged women in Sierra Leone. Through interacting with these communities, I concluded that empowerment must be considered within the context of each area of society and within each community, and it is closely tied to economic power and heavily dependent on access to education (as discussed in more detail in

⁷ Empower(ment) 1. to give authority or power to someone. 2. make someone stronger or more confident (OED, 2008, p.326).

Chapter Four). Most participants in this study, being deprived of education, relied on inherited instinctive knowledge and skills. Women supported each other in informal groups and networks that had the potential to increase livelihood options as a route to empowerment. When women's economic earnings rose, their status was also raised; they gained a stronger voice and commanded greater respect in the community (see Chapter Six).

2.4 Agency, Governance & Corruption

Shaw (2002) argues that women including those who are subject to the worst forms of oppression possess agency that they can use to manoeuvre within their limited choices and options. Women have the capacity to subvert the intentions of partners and community leaders and to act according to whether they believe they are beneficial or not. The term 'agency' requires consideration in the context of women's lives in Sierra Leone. In my observation it was true that women in adversity exercised agency, but I also noted that women achieved greater autonomy through collective action. Leach (1994, p. 212) observed during periods of extended research that Mende⁸ women resisted situations that they resented. They did so publicly - in the village and in family courts - or in 'covert' ways. Women coped through seeking alternative means of access to resources usually through independent activities or social networks, all of which can be construed as methods of utilising agency.

Agency is one of the three measures of empowerment, along with resources and achievements, that I discuss in detail in Chapter Four. Kabeer (1999) argues that agency, although more difficult to measure than empowerment, is part of a process of decision-making that involves negotiation, deception, and sometimes manipulation, in order to move towards achievement and improved well-being. I propose that this definition refers to the *unempowered*, those *not* in a position to exert power over their circumstances. Therefore, such people (women) are forced to resort to subversion; this interpretation is a common presumption used in reference to women's characters as well as their position. A woman's identity emerges as a result of how she interacts with, interprets and reconstructs her environment (Parpart, 1995, p.151).

Sen (1999) defines agency as what a person is free to do and achieve in pursuit of whatever goals or values he or she regards as important. In asserting women's agency, their earning power, economic role outside the family, literacy, education and property rights can act as

⁸ Leach lived and worked with Mende communities in the Gola North Forest Reservation in Eastern Sierra Leone for fifteen months in 1987 – 1988 during extended periods of fieldwork. She made two subsequent one month visits in 1990 and 1991 (Leach, 1994, p. xviii).

catalysts for social change. Sen focuses attention on the value of women's agency in the service of others rather less so on the importance of improvement in the individual's quality of life. I propose that women employ agency as a defence mechanism when they are challenged or threatened.

Chabal and Daloz, apropos of their research in "contemporary Black Africa", argue that:

what is distinct in Africa is the creative manner in which the overlap of modernity and tradition combines to create a form of political accountability which is rooted in the instrumentalisation of disorder

(Chabal & Daloz, 1999, p. 147)

This view is supported by Kapuscinski (2002), (referenced in chapter 1), another researcher and writer with extensive, first-hand knowledge of Africa. I propose this is a method of agency used by an oppressed population which was employed as a way of opposing the oppressor during the colonial period. I further contend that agency in this form continues among populations previously suppressed by colonialists, more recently victims of conflict, displaced and extremely poor, who are now targeted by development.

Leach (1995) makes oblique reference to agency when she rejects the notion of women's defenceless acceptance of processes that deny them access to resources. She speaks of women's manipulation of circumstances and of the coping mechanisms women employ in seeking alternative access to resources through independent activities and social networks. Leach offers an interesting perspective on agency in her example of NGO interference in women farmers' traditional methods of planting, which led to disastrous outcomes. Women complied with an NGO project that they were aware was inappropriate in the hope they would receive help from the "big people" in the future. They regarded it as "investing in patronage work" (Leach, 1994, p. 222). Leach cites this as an example of the resilience of local social processes and concepts that avoid the wholesale subversion or transformation by outsiders that can be interpreted as application of women's agency, a lesson to be taken on board by so-called 'developmentalists'. I propose that these manoeuvres are not exclusively employed by women, rather that they permeate through society as a method of control exerted by the oppressed.

Empowerment and agency require mutual reinforcement by the next link in the chain of development - robust governance, which is dependent on transparency and accountability. It is widely accepted, for example, that defective political and economic structures are exacerbated by corrupt leadership that fails to ensure effective justice systems and a secure rule of law intended to protect civil liberties and encourage an active civil society. Sierra Leone suffers

from extremely weak governance that disempowers the population and effectively denies citizens their right to hold the government to account. Women, as the most disenfranchised in society, suffer most. My observation was that moves to improve standards of governance and to increase transparency in the system were stymied by those who risked losing the benefits they enjoyed from operating within the existing dysfunctional system.

In the course of my research I became aware of widespread tolerance of corruption in its many manifestations, and the ways in which it impacts on economic and social positioning.

Corruption in the context of this investigation is as intrinsic to day-to-day survival within a system as it is endemic. Examples of varying degrees of corruption were recounted by individuals at different strata of society - from the government and bureaucratic administration, where bribery is necessary to secure a position through cronyism and patrimonialism, to community levels where payment is obligatory if one is to avail of basic rights and amenities (see Chapters Four, Five and Six). In the case of at least one INGO, principal donors fund the organisation directly, bypassing the GoSL as a method of minimising funding discrepancies, but this by no means guarantees that fraudulent activities are eliminated (see Chapter Six).

Corruption has a disproportionate impact on the disadvantaged and most vulnerable, who are forced to pay bribes for basic facilities such as water and the freedom to trade, both of which threaten survival and directly affect the lives of women. I give specific examples of corrupt practices later in the thesis, but the question of corruption in Africa involves the entire population (Chabal & Daloz, 1999). It is recognised that petty corruption is embedded in day-to-day life, and in such instances (whereby it instigated by one individual over another) it is largely self-serving and arbitrary. But at an elite level it is accepted that the abuse of formal power for personal gain serves larger and more legitimate 'moral' purposes: it entitles the individual to be elevated to a position of publicly accepted 'respectability' (Chabal & Daloz, 1999, p. 159). Corruption and governance can be seen to interact with agency, which is necessary to employ in order to manoeuvre amidst weak governance within a corrupt system.

2.5 Mainstream Development: Economic & Political Issues

In the context of Sierra Leone, the merit of conventional measures that are used to determine levels of poverty and well-being can be challenged. Narrow parameters, such as GDP, are not applicable to the disadvantaged and extreme poor where the majority of the workforce is engaged in the informal economy. The Better Life Index (OECD, 2011) applies broader measures to gauge progress; it takes into account quality of work, trust in society,

environment, peace and security, social and family relations. The Legatum Prosperity Index (Legatum Institute, 2013) uses another set of indicators based on wealth, economic growth and quality of life; it includes entrepreneurship and opportunity, governance, education, health, safety and security and personal freedom. In this index, Sierra Leone is ranked 129 out of 142 countries, a harsh reminder of the extreme conditions endured by most of the population.

Bhutan takes a different approach, it positions development within a National Happiness Index (NHI), in which happiness is considered to be integral to achieving a good quality of life. Nine core domains are assessed: psychological well-being, health, time use, education, cultural diversity and resilience, good governance, community vitality, ecological diversity and resilience and living standards (Helliwell, Layard & Sachs, 2017), which Bhutan mainstreams with the SDGs. These indicators are closely aligned with GDP, which measures the economic prosperity of the country. Although this appears to be an ideal that is far removed from Sierra Leone, the values embedded in the NHI set high aspirational levels and serve as a further reminder of the need to create a flexible development framework that takes differing socio-economic structures and standards into account. Easterley states that:

Development requires to create a model that respects the individual rights of poor people. International development policy and practice ostensibly designed to alleviate poverty is subverted by political systems that neglect the rights of the poor and do little to actually alleviate poverty.

(Easterley, 2009).

Grindle (2002), in her World Bank report, introduced the concept of “good enough governance”. Between 2002 and 2015 Grindle became increasingly critical of reliance on ‘good governance’, by then broadly regarded as the ‘magic bullet’, a quick-fix panacea to resolve development issues (Grindle, 2002, 2007, 2010, 2015). In her 2015 lecture, *A Cautionary Tale*, Grindle casts doubt on the motives of donor agencies. She proposed that during the post-conflict period when governments are called upon by donors to embark on costly, comprehensive reconstruction programmes with limited finance and resources of their own, such pressures undermine governance capacity and exert a negative impact on socio-economic development. Grindle calls for good governance to be rethought and restructured so that it is country-specific, (Grindle, 2010) and, as I also suggest, it requires to demonstrate sensitivity to context. I add a caveat, that good governance must contain gender as a central component within its framework, something that Grindle largely overlooks in her critique.

2.6 Approaches to Understanding Development

The “Three Pillars Approach” gained broad recognition as a concept but it has been criticised for its lack of theoretical foundations. Institutionalised in the Brundtland Report *Our Common Future* (UNWECD, 1987) it was proposed as a route to sustainable development. The report set out to address weaknesses in the reliance on economic growth, highlighting the need for development to function within the parameters of finite world resources and proposed that there were strong links between climate change and sustainability. Women’s right to self-determination was acknowledged, as was the need for female education and increased enrolment and the importance of women in relation to population policy (UNWECD, 1987, pp. 45 & 51).

As noted earlier, participation has become a ubiquitous term in the development lexicon, but the proposed move towards a methodology that focused on Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) by Chambers (1983), at the time represented a major shift in approaches to development. The principal aim of PRA was to create strong relationships at the community level by establishing dialogue between ‘beneficiaries’ and ‘stakeholders’, but by the 1990s, shortcomings began to be identified in the theoretical aspects of this methodology. Simmons, for example, highlighted the need to develop lines of communication that extended beyond consultation and participation in order to achieve empowerment. Women, she asserted, were entitled to *real* choice, and problems that “smacked of condescension” had arisen with the imposition of definitions (and limitations on them) of women’s aspirations when articulated by those in power. Simmonds brought gender into sharp focus by arguing that choice had to be totally under women’s control with respect accorded to other forms of knowledge (Simmons, 1997,). Parpart acknowledges the considerable contribution of PRA, including its ability to break down conventional barriers between development practitioners and communities and bring the least privileged members of society into the development process. But she questions the capacity of PRA in the long-term to improve conditions of the most vulnerable and act as a successful strategy for social change. She discusses the need for connections to be made at local, national and international levels (Parpart, 2000, pp. 137-152).

Latouche, along with Rahnema and Escobar, has been instrumental in underpinning the evolution of the theory that has evolved from this study. Latouche proposes a provocative definition of a post-development environment in which he envisages the future of the world post-West, a world after Western civilisation. He takes a radically different direction to that of

neo-liberalism. In his critique of capitalism, Latouche (1991, p. 26) posits that, “the economic must be understood in terms of culture. Cultural domination equates with material exploitation”. He warns of the dangers of ‘Third World’ countries being subsumed by capitalism and claims further that Westernisation strips individuals of any sense of value or self-identity. I empathise with Latouche, whose views resonate with my experience of displaced and recently-settled populations in Sierra Leone (post-conflict, 2002 and later) who demonstrate by their allegiances that they are not prepared to jettison the safety-net of cultural and traditional beliefs and practices to adopt a globalised system that runs counter to the predominant local mindset.

Latouche refers to the “eight Rs”; a set of independent objectives that can trigger a “virtuous circle of quiet contraction”. He lists them as follows: Re-evaluate, Reconceptualise, Restructure, Redistribute, Relocalise, Reduce, Re-use and Recycle.⁹ And adds four more notions - Renew, Rediscover, Reintroduce and Recuperate - and relates them to a break in economic and cultural dependency on the North. He advocates a move by the South to renew contact with the thread of history that was interrupted by colonisation (a theme examined by Galeano, 1976), development and globalisation, and highlights the need to Rediscover and Reappropriate the cultural identity of the South, Recuperating traditional technologies and skills. Latouche also emphasizes the importance of “localisation” in a model of development that understands the impact of colonialism and its legacy, which I investigate further in Chapter Three and argue de-growth philosophies contain a range of perspectives that are fundamental to rethinking development. These concepts construct a framework to take development forward (replacing Neo-Liberalism which Latouche describes as “toxic”) and are therefore essential to the study of viable routes to improve the position of disadvantaged populations, particularly women.

Further critics of methodologies employed in international development include Chabal and Daloz who reject the very idea that solutions can be successfully prescribed from the outside (Chabal & Daloz, 1999,) and De Waal (1997) who is highly sceptical of the outsider/development practitioner or aid worker who makes a brief visit to the relatively easy-to-access ‘local’ environment in the dry season, then passes judgement on the situation of local people. Chabal and Daloz in their analysis of “disorder in Africa” are among a growing group of seasoned researchers and writers who question the validity of Western (i.e., post-colonial)

⁹ Latouche adds radicalise, reconvert, redefine, reinvent (democracy), resize, remodel, rehabilitate, reduce speed, relax, render, repurchase, reimburse, renounce, rethink and finally resist to the list, all of which are implied to a degree in the 8 Rs.(Latouche, 2015, p. 33)

concepts of development, corruption, civil society and even the state (Chabal & Daloz, 1997). From an anthropological perspective, Leach makes critical arguments based on extensive village-level fieldwork she carried out in Sierra Leone. She concludes that “the development project” is out of touch with those it is intended to benefit (Leach, 1994). She offers a reminder that histories of capitalist and colonial encounters are creatively incorporated into cultural worlds. In this context, Western ideologies incline towards oversimplification of the role of women whose work is classified as taking care of the general welfare of the family (sustenance and feeding), another simplification that ignores the need to cultivate an understanding of interests and activities that contribute to women’s social and economic status (Leach, 1994, p. 27). Parpart argues (with reference to Kenya) that while postmodernism’s approach may bear some relevance to the position of women in Western industrialised societies, in its critique of modernisation and development it risks increasing the alienation and marginalisation of African women while it fails to give them practical support (Parpart, 1995). Parpart’s insight draws attention to the fine balance that must be drawn in development between efficacy and interference.

Debates surrounding development emphasise the need for rural development, but to a large extent they bypass the requirement to scrutinize patterns of urban development, which is of equal importance in responding to challenges that women face living in the city. The population of Sierra Leone is 7,880,536, 35.7% of which (approximately 2.8 million people) is located in urban areas (Worldometer, 2019). The capital city, Freetown, has a population of 1,168,000 (WPR, 2019), but lacks an adequate, functioning infrastructure as is evidenced by annual flooding of low-lying districts in the city and exemplified by the 2017 mudslide. Moser advocates for increased recognition of the links between economic and social development in the urban environment, and for the need for women to be supported in asset accumulation. She asserts that for meaningful gender transformation¹⁰ (in the urban environment) to take place there must be major shifts in development planning: women should be granted land tenure rights; their safety and security must be guaranteed, and the importance of informal economy opportunities must be fully recognised and integrated into urban development (Moser, 2017, p.235). Moser’s proposals resonate with Lefebvre who, in summary, asserts that access to urban resources is dependent on the exercise of collective power to reshape the processes of urbanisation (Lefebvre, 1991 & Purcell, 2016).

¹⁰ The New Urban Agenda (NUA) views assets as giving people the capability to be and to act, their possession creates agency that is linked to the empowerment of individuals and communities (Moser, 2016, p.226).

Parpart argues that achieving social, economic and political transformation requires an acknowledgment of social change and that this occurs in response to collective group demands. That it is to say, it requires a “bottom up” process that requires a major shift from the “top down” approach of UN agencies. Transformation of gender inequities must embrace modernity and development. This links with Parpart’s premise that local is paramount, but that for change to take place at this level it must connect with national and international development structures (Parpart, 2000,). Furthermore, even for women who choose to lead a traditional life, economic and political opportunities must be firmly in place (Nussbaum, 2000). My data reflects this: the case studies of women’s networks presented in Chapter Six confirm that women gain the collective capacity to organise according to their needs, interests and rights when they are supported by networks that effectively boost public recognition of women’s individual rights as citizens and workers. The next step is to ensure these networks link effectively into adequately resourced national and international networks that reinforce transformation (Kabeer, 1999).

Shiva (1989) identified a link between the violation of nature and the denigration and marginalisation of women that occurred during the “paternalistic and aggressive” evolution of a science that not only excludes ecological and holistic ways of knowing (i.e., those that understand and respect nature’s processes and interconnectedness) but also excludes women as experts. Critics of Shiva’s pronouncements claim that her research in India was not broad-based, and that it was conducted among members of an upper caste. The suggestion is that these upper-caste women have a choice. But in my research, I found many examples of groups of women, who have *no* choice due to their circumstances, and who are forced by extreme poverty to carry out work that damages the environment and threatens their survival and that of their families.

In urban districts many women derived a meagre living from breaking stone, which they gouged from the rocky hillsides in the same area where they live. Activities such as these contribute to the destabilisation of the land that risks devastating disasters such as the one that occurred in August 2017 when a massive landslide resulted in at least 1,000 fatalities (Ratcliffe, 2017). Women in Marimbo Water (an area of Kaningo, a district in Freetown) were paid paltry amounts by builders according to the weight of each load they carried. Their work was insecure, but women in their desperation to earn a living went ahead with it despite the likely outcomes of their labour. Other women in the community earned small amounts gara-dyeing (dyeing textiles) and most augmented their income as petty traders, selling cheap assorted

merchandise in the neighbourhood in the rains. In rural districts women depended on small-scale agriculture where earnings fluctuated each season according to crop yields. In the rains, they also worked as petty traders.¹¹ As links are consolidated between local activities and national and international women's collectives and organisations, I suggest it will give women the voice to negotiate improved wages and working conditions.

The paradigms I review next share certain common beliefs and core values. Proponents of post-development practices and transitional discourses connect with theories of degrowth, Buen Vivir and concepts of a pluriverse or a multiverse. Leading theorists discussed here advocate that development should be deconstructed and replaced by holistic propositions that demonstrate greater sensitivity towards people and the environment in which they live. These scholars support a post-capitalist approach to development as a sustainable route of progress rather than the often-cited juggernaut of capitalism that underpins globalisation (Escobar, 1995). Such alternative concepts demonstrate an empathy that is largely lacking in conventional development methodologies. I assert that theorists such as Escobar (1995 & 2015), Galeano, Latouche (2010), Appadurai (1996), and Shiva (1997) among others favour development paradigms that fit well with the context of this study. Policy, I argue, needs to revisit the elements of such paradigms that align with the needs of women in communities in Sierra Leone rather than revising existing theories and practices.

Context is a crucial component of Buen Vivir (BV), a movement that explores possibilities of routes of advancement independent of a modern Eurocentric tradition. The BV movement (which focuses on a 'good life') is a development concept that is emerging out of Latin American countries where indigenous groups in Ecuador, Chile, Argentina, Mexico and Bolivia, suffered from colonialist repression and the marginalisation of indigenous knowledge, traditions and culture, which shares parallels with the history of Sierra Leone. Gudynas asserts that BV, in common with protagonists of a spectrum of alternative socio-economic structures enacted in Latin America, focusses on "a fullness of life in the community" (Gudynas, 2011, p. 442) and demands that we look beyond modern Western culture (see also, Latouche, 2015; Gudynas, 2011; Escobar, 2015 & 2016). Gudynas references Escobar (1992) and his distinction between 'alternative developments' and 'alternatives to development' (Gudynas, 2011), and he

¹¹ Women, girls, boys and men who function as traders and small-scale entrepreneurs in the informal economy as a method of survival. They cook and sell food, fish, rice, household items and trinkets on the streets, on street stalls and in markets. In rural areas women farmers augment their income during the rains when they have no income from farming. An estimated 68% of the labour force is involved in the informal sector, most in rural districts (SSL, 2015).

regards BV as a radical deconstruction of the cultural base of development, its discourses, applications and institutional frameworks. BV emphasises the need for humans to reject control and destruction of nature; instead there is need for respect for and harmonisation with the environment as advocated by Shiva (1997).

Acosta (2017), offers a reminder that 'the good life' (BV) is a pluralistic concept, it is without capitalist roots and is embedded in the community. Buen Vivir is a concept that continues to evolve, representing a shift away from exclusive focus on economic progress towards a humanistic approach empathetic with individual quality of life. It is underpinned by various criteria: liberty and autonomy - which encourage individual agency; willpower and determination - are complemented by coexistence and social inclusion. When these are combined, they raise the capacity of the individual to exert control over his or her life and are central to human development and the expansion of human liberties (Walsh, 2010, p.9, 10). In summary, BV places value on unity, equality, dignity, freedom, solidarity, reciprocity, social and gender equality, social justice and responsibility, with ethical and moral principles linked to economic organisation of the state.

In 2008, BV was written into the constitution of Ecuador, and in 2009 it was included in the constitution of Bolivia as a bedrock for rights that featured health, shelter, education, food and the environment, though sadly, neither has endured the extant aggressive capitalist structure. BV champions a progressive, sensitive path towards progression, but critics claim that it is enveloped by neo-liberalism, a tool that is subverted by the prevailing global system to maintain its control (Walsh, 2010). I contest this position, arguing that BV can present a positive challenge to dominant paradigms. In its rejection of the mainstream it offers options that can be effective in poverty reduction that can make a positive contribution to a model of sustainable community development that is inclusive of the vulnerable and disadvantaged and will be instrumental in improving their status. Escobar (2015), in common with post-development theorists such as Rahnema and Latouche, challenges the hegemony of Western and Eurocentric systems and knowledge. He rejects Western interpretations of our existence, which predominate in mainstream international development. He insists on a shift from the predominantly accepted "universal" (Western) stance towards "transitional discourses" that examine the concept of the "pluriverse", proposing the viability of multiple existences, in which many worlds sit within global politics and economics. He refers to this as 'Epistemologies of the South'.

In my examination of the capacity of development concepts that are viable in a local context, I refer to Illich (1971), another strong critic of the development process who over decades has challenged its motives and integrity cautioning that its supposed *certainties* must continue to be challenged. In common with Illich (1971) and Freire (1970), Estava (2014) argues that learning has to value experience and knowledge, and that learning strategies must respect indigenous knowledge and acknowledge the struggles of social groups. Based on data gathered from conversations with women in the communities (see Chapter Six), I conclude that *uncertainties* predominate in the displaced communities and the settlements discussed in this study.

Mignolo (2000) speaks of 'learning to unlearn'. He refers to 'border thinking', with the pluriversal emerging from diverse local experiences that occur through time and around the world and take place between local Western and non-Western histories. It is an epistemology that interconnects the plurality and diversity of de-colonial projects. It was clear to me during fieldwork that there was an absence of respect for tacit knowledge and a failure to embrace it within routes of progression. My experience in Sierra Leone confirmed what Escobar (2015) notes; that insight into alternative routes of progression is best gleaned 'on the ground' from observation and integration of grassroots practices. I argue, based on my experience, that indigenous skills must be accredited with equal importance to learning that stems from more formal 'Westernised' education. To understand something of the agency they possessed and the enterprise that they demonstrated I found it crucial to observe, listen and interact with individual women and members of women's networks in their neighbourhoods and communities.

Escobar (2015) seeks a holistic vision of alternative worlds based on ecological integrity and social justice. In discussing transitional discourses, he suggests that the framework of degrowth, which opposes the quest for continuous economic growth, should be positioned within a broader context that includes ecological and cultural transitions. Similarly, Latouche considers the legacy of colonisation and imperialism, stating categorically that degrowth is only conceivable in a "degrowth society", and within the framework of a system based on a different logic (Latouche, 2015, p. 8) Although at first glance the notion of degrowth appears disconnected from socio-economic challenges faced by women in Sierra Leone, on closer scrutiny it sits comfortably within these traditional societal structures. Degrowth philosophies resonate with women's groups where displacement has resulted in members of newly constructed neighbourhoods coming together in their struggle to establish viable socio-economic structures that sit within a finite world with finite resources. My observations

coincide with Appadurai's (1996, p.178- 8) comments regarding "boundaries, zones of danger requiring ritual maintenance" that reflect my experience in urban and rural environments: observance of the formalities of traditional protocols and introductions was intrinsic to all local neighbourhoods (see Chapter Six). As an outsider I was aware that I should examine concepts of context, neighbourhood and locality as proposed by Appadurai, which identified socio-economic issues at a local level. It was necessary to scrutinise the positioning of identities and complexities of neighbourhoods in which "spatial localisations, quotidian interaction and social scale were not always familiar in form or relationship" (Appadurai, 1996, p.178- 8).

2.7 Conclusion

Gender mainstreaming, the primary mechanism to achieve gender equality and empowerment, introduced in the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action (PfA) has been overtaken by gender transformation which is linked directly to gender asset accumulation (Moser, 2016, p. 222-226), which in turn is dependent on major shifts in the application of customary law that will entitle women to own property and inherit. Extremely poor and disadvantaged groups have little chance of catching up unless they receive adequate education and the necessary support to represent themselves. I emphasise the importance of using an intersectional framework that stresses that disadvantaged women are likely beset by multiple sources of oppression. This is a challenge of immense proportions that runs counter to the commitment of the SDGs 'to leave no one behind'.

Each element I have reviewed in this chapter has contributed a new dimension of insight to this investigation, enriching the basic body of knowledge on subject matter that underpins the study. Post-development theorists subscribe to the view that current development policy and practice is Eurocentric and is inappropriate for application in the so-called 'local' non-Western context. Transitional Discourses emerging from the post-development debate put forward by theorists such as Escobar, Rahnema and Latouche use language that is rich in innovation and that translates into practical perspectives that can be integrated into small-scale innovative and sustainable development. These paradigms so far remain peripheral to the discussion, but they are powerful tools in advocating for the pursuit of avenues of development policy and programming that synchronise with the needs of the participants in this study, as well as marginalised people more widely.

3. SIERRA LEONE:

HISTORICAL, CULTURAL, POLITICAL AND GENDERED CONTEXT

My discomfort with Western civilisation and modernity is also a discomfort with the capitalist economy, an economy that puts growth before life, individual success before communal well-being.

(Mignolo, 2012, p. xxi)

3.1 Introduction

In Chapter One I set out the purpose of this research: to determine why, in spite of a sustained financial and programme response to support the GoSL with resources coming from donors including DFID, USAID, the UN's Country Team (UNCT), and the European Union (EU), there is so little improvement in the socio-economic status of women in Sierra Leone. I then provided the theoretical framework that underpins this thesis, which draws on eminent theorists and practitioners across a range of disciplines who reject a Western-centric approach to development policy and practice, including key proponents of post-development and transitional discourse who offer alternative perspectives and innovative paradigms, which I assert have the capacity to resolve development issues. Here in Chapter Three I present history, culture and traditional practices that have been paramount in shaping women's position in society and the significance of these factors, arguing that the importance of examining them in context is largely unrecognised within the development framework. Recognition that these underlying factors dictate the individual's position in society is essential to the search for fresh insight into solutions to the issues that obstruct progress for women and girls.

I begin by examining three specific historical eras in relation to Sierra Leone: slavery, colonialism and the 1991-2002 civil war. I argue that these periods have effectively dislocated women from their traditional position in society and have contributed to women's reduced status. I highlight ways in which endemic patriarchy subjugates women and I scrutinise the influence of women's secret societies and the power they also hold over women. I argue that the beliefs held by the *Bondo* and *Sande* (female) secret societies and the traditional rituals practised by them are instrumental in blocking women's socio-economic advancement and curtailing their independence. I investigate the powers attributed to witchcraft and the occult, the close relationship women have with these forces, and the degree to which these cosmologies endorse and normalise inequalities that affect women and girls. While certain elements of these belief systems can offer women support and even afford them a safe space and

protection when they feel vulnerable or threatened, such ideologies can also be used with malevolent intent to control women through fear and intimidation. Throughout this chapter, I consider the many challenges and barriers to women's equality in Sierra and assess ways in which they are connected to these various historic and contemporary dimensions.

3.2 The Influence of History on Women's Status: Slavery, Colonialism & Conflict

Particular periods in Sierra Leone's history have diminished women's status and position. First was the establishment of the Atlantic (export) slave trade and indigenous (internal) (Shaw, 2002, p. 22) slave-raiding and trading by tribes who sought man (and woman) power to fuel the expansion of internal and external trade routes that took place in Sierra Leone during the 16th, 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. Commercial transactions that entailed the exchange of human life were commonplace, and women were bought and sold as domestic slaves and wives. They were regarded as commodities; a dehumanising process that effectively transmuted persons into merchandise of greater or lesser value (Shaw, 2002). The colonial 'legitimate trade'¹² sanctioned selling into slavery women and men, and those who had been convicted as witches through the process of divination could also be enslaved and traded within Africa. The procedure, integral to supplying the thriving internal slave trade, completely debased women, and the divinatory accusation against 'witches' only ceased to be a means of transforming people into "trade goods" towards the end of the era of slavery (Shaw, 2002).

It is important with any indigenous customs and practices, in this instance indigenous slavery, for the researcher to exercise caution against binary judgement and misunderstanding of local habits. In Sierra Leone the number of slaves kept by kings and rich men was a measure of the owner's wealth. Slaves were generally considered part of the master's household, and it could prove difficult to distinguish between slaves and free persons. An enslaved individual who served well could become a 'big man'. He could be allowed to own property or marry within the master's household and gradually become part of the extended family and a female Yolunka slave (originating from Guinea) would become free on her wedding night, (Alie, 1990, p. 24).

¹² The British made the 'Atlantic slave trade' illegal in 1806 for all British subjects. They promoted the 'legitimate trade' in products such as timber, camwood, palm oil, palm kernels and groundnuts which was dependent on slave labour within the interior for production and transportation of goods. This continued until 1928 (Shaw, 2002, p. 37-38).

A settlement for groups of freed people was established in 1787, and soon after, in 1808, the British Crown Colony of Sierra Leone was established. In the early 19th century, landless Creoles arrived in Sierra Leone from Nova Scotia followed by groups from Dahomey, Yorubaland, Congo, Gambia, and Senegal, and then the Maroons (freed people who had been enslaved in Jamaica) (Fyle, 2011, p. 49). The groups were followed by recaptives (freed slaves) who outnumbered the earlier groups, and who had been transported to Sierra Leone to settle there. These groups were dependent on Europeans for work. Regent, the first village outside Freetown, was established in 1812, followed by the settlements of Kissy and Wilberforce. In 1829 the British had contemplated leaving the colony but had reconsidered, convinced that if they did so the slave trade would continue unabated. The trafficking of slaves continued into the 1850s, with skirmishes over land breaking out with the indigenous Ashanti. Enslavement was officially prohibited by the British in 1898, but it was allowed to continue within the British Protectorate of Sierra Leone, established in 1896 (Zack-Williams, 2012, p. 252), the assumption being, that slavery would eventually die out with the advance of Western civilisation. (Alie, 1990; Fyle, 2011, p. 139). It was more than four decades later that it finally ceased when a law was passed in 1928 abolishing all forms of slavery in Sierra Leone (Shaw, 2002; Fyle, 2011, p. 140).

Aaron Belisarius Cosimo Sibthorpe (A. B. C. Sibthorpe) who is thought to have been a recaptive (a freed slave) from Guinea who settled in Sierra Leone where he trained as a schoolteacher provides some sense of the flavour of Freetown in the 19th century and the disparate influxes it absorbed. He was an avid botanist and practised as a herbal doctor. He wrote the first African history of Sierra Leone, depicting the social and economic life of his community with “vividness of colour and animated description” (Sibthorpe 1868, p.342 cited by Fyfe, 1992), Maroons came from Jamaica, while Nova Scotians copied European dress, adding embellishments, kerchiefs and headdresses, beads and rings. They adopted Western foods, played chess, and the women enjoyed dancing the Koonken. By mid-century Freetown was home mainly to liberated Africans including from the Hausa, Ibo, Nupe and Yoruba. Dancing was popular, especially the Shakee Shakee and the Gumbay, and Sibthorpe noted that:

Wolof women were stately, they wore mantillas, otherwise they were naked [...] In 1888, Freetown became a municipal city with 30,000 inhabitants. It was heterogeneous, with brown, yellow, jet black, English, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Mandingos, Susas and Foulahs. Everyone was in pursuit of money and remained as long as business was profitable.

(Sibthorpe, 1868, cited by Fyfe, 1992)

While there is no doubt the majority of women in Sierra Leone were repressed during the 18th and 19th centuries, there are numerous examples of exceptionally strong, influential female leaders during that era. For example, in 1787 Queen Yamacouba was a signatory to the treaty that ceded territory to the British.



Image 1. Madam Yoko in The Quarterly Papers: The Colonial Office Library (Fyle, 1963)

In 1898 the Hut Tax War broke out; a revolt against the British move to impose taxes on all dwelling places. The tax was supported by Madam Yoko (pictured above), the principal ruler of the Kpaa Mende ethnic group. She was a controversial figure appointed by the British, and was a loyal friend of the administration, who in turn gave her protection when her life was threatened by her subjects for apparently colluding with the British (Alie, 1990). The formidable Madam Yoko effectively exercised agency within the constraints of the traditional environment of the 19th century. With reference to Madam Yoko, Hoffer (1974) summarises the tension between traditional practices and women's agency that remain until today:

She and her co-other initiates were ritually set apart in the sacred grove of the society where they were instructed in singing, dancing, medicine, child-bearing and rearing and other traditional knowledge pertaining to the role of wife and mother. After a few months of training in the Bundu bush, she took an oath of secrecy, swearing never to divulge the women's secrets she had learned.

(Hoffer, 1974, p.177)

After the death of her second husband Madam Yoko became the diplomatic representative for her third husband and then, following his demise, was recognised in 1884 as a paramount chief. This was after years of successfully elevating her position through advantageous negotiations with the British in the midst of political upheavals, during which she gained their respect and collaborated with them to the advantage of both herself and her people. Another female chief who employed this type of 'patriarchal bargaining' is Nyarroh, who used agency to broker peace between warring clans during the colonial period (Day, 2007, cited by Bosire, 2012, p. 182). By 1914, fifteen per cent of Mende paramount chiefs were women, further evidence that women could successfully lead, even within a patriarchal society (Kyle, 1963, p. 123; Hoffer, 1974; Fyle, 2011). The examples are cited because it is important to draw attention to cultural and traditional complexities affecting women, both historical and in the present day, that may otherwise be missed by the outsider.



Image 2. Teachers and children at Charlotte School in the 1880s in *The Quarterly Papers*: The Colonial Office Library (Fyle, 1963)

Tensions between indigenous practices and customs and pressures induced by extraneous forces were exacerbated during the colonial period. British colonialists favoured a system of indirect rule that relied on modifying indigenous institutions to implement colonial policies and maintain order. Kings and queens, the former rulers in Sierra Leone, now found themselves part of a protectorate under the rule of Britain and Queen Victoria. They were appointed paramount chiefs within the colonial administration by the British, which forced them into a

subordinate relationship (Alie, 1990, p. 138). Colonial rule was adapted to fit with local agendas, not out of altruism but rather to serve political and economic goals and to reinforce and maintain power (Chabal & Daloz, 1999). Artificial borders imposed by colonialists forced tribal and community divides, which it is proposed became a root cause of many countries' problems (Ikome, 2012; Gashaw, 2017). Added to this was the introduction of Western education for girls as well as boys and the strong influence of Christianity imposed on local people by the British, also described by Achebe in relation to Nigeria in *Things Fall Apart* (2006). The establishment of schools such as the Annie Walsh school for girls in 1849 in Freetown, while it was of benefit to girls in making them literate and numerate, it was also instrumental in the disruption in girls' and women's previous role in society (Fyfe & Jones, 1968).

Sierra Leone gained independence from Britain in 1961 and became a member of the Commonwealth ten years later (Fyfe, 1970; Wyse, 1990). After independence, attempts to set up a democratic system failed, and the country moved towards a one-party state during the seventeen-year leadership of President Siaka Stevens. Freedom was restricted, and political dissent was quelled, and many of those who opposed the government were imprisoned as the social and economic state of the country declined. Political control became a means to gaining economic wealth, with personal rewards potentially so great that politicians resorted to extreme measures to win and maintain their position. Power became de-institutionalised and personalised, resulting in dysfunctional public institutions and random violence (Bolten, 2012; Zack-Williams, 2012; Jackson, 2004). The political elite opportunistically promoted disorder to misappropriate state economic resources (TRC, 2004), and growing numbers of Sierra Leoneans were on the brink of starvation. In 1991, as the situation deteriorated further, Charles Taylor (the former President of Liberia) armed rebels in retaliation for what he claimed was provocation by the President of Sierra Leone and moved into Eastern Sierra Leone, taking control of Kono, the diamond district. This was the principal spark that ignited the outbreak of the eleven-year civil war. In response, the Revolutionary United Front abducted, recruited, trained and armed child soldiers who were forced to carry out atrocities. This initial rebel group subsequently fragmented, leading to the formation of many others including the Kamajors. They would hunt and kill soldiers and were suspected of nurturing magic through cannibalistic rituals (Bolten, 2012; Zack-Williams, 2012).

The seismic socio-economic shifts forced upon indigenous populations during the colonial era between the late 18th and early 20th centuries set women and girls on an altered socio-economic

trajectory that forced them to reject their indigenous culture and traditions. Women agriculturists were stripped of their status; Europeans considered cultivation men's work and introduced land reforms that were disadvantageous to women farmers. This move, combined with men taking over production of cash crops, severely diminished the status of women in society. The emulation of a European lifestyle and the preference for women to be home-based, a practice that would have been alien to women in Sierra Leone, irrevocably transformed women's role (Taqi, 2010; Alie, 1990). They were transposed into the home as Christian, domestic wives and partners and were educated in the colonial system. Women had no control over these major changes, which effectively detached them from their past. However, I do not subscribe to the view that this era can be deemed entirely responsible for the degradation of women's status. As I have demonstrated, the denigration of women was cumulative and was a gradual process that occurred over centuries, beginning with the era of slavery. Key factors related to the colonial era re-designated women's position in society. The penetration of capitalism that replaced local systems of reciprocity (sharing, barter and exchange) was yet another historic change that added to existing economic pressures (Boserup, 1970). Many women were forced to adapt without the support of education or training as they continued to rely on subsistence agriculture for survival.

The one-party state imposed by the All People's Congress (APC) party in 1978 proved to be a hiatus in women's embryonic independent political activism and mobilisation, which lasted until 1994 when women began to formally organise themselves. Women were active in several important women's organisations established in the 1990's. For example, in 1994, Zainab Bangura set up the Women Organised for a Morally Enlightened Nation (WOMEN)(ADS, n.d.), in 1995, the Sierra Leonean Women's Movement for Peace (SLWMP) convened a debate on peace (Yusu-Sherriff, 2000); and the Sierra Leone Association of University Women (SLAUW) was established in 1997 which led to the creation of the Sierra Leone Women's Forum (an umbrella organisation of over fifty women's groups) in 2001. Members of the Women's Forum spearheaded women's political organisation for peace and democratisation. The organisations did succeed in introducing a female perspective into a range of fundamental issues (Yusu-Sheriff, 2000, p.4), but they lacked a strategic plan of action to implement their vision and failed to present an ideological position in the long-term. At the National Consultative Conferences in 1995, women demanded a fifty per cent representation in any peace delegation and full involvement in decision-making at all levels, and yet there was no female representative at negotiations for the Abidjan Peace Accord meeting in 1996. Moreover,

only two female representatives attended negotiations that led to the signing of the Lome Peace Agreement in 1999 (Zack-Williams, 2012, p.150)

During the Sierra Leone Civil War (1991-2002) large swathes of the country's, towns and villages and settlements were destroyed or severely damaged. Fifty thousand people, mostly men, lost their lives, but women suffered many vicious atrocities (TRC, 2004, pp.83-230). Up to 600,000 people (of the population of 5.1 million at that time) were displaced. An estimated 30% of combatants were women. Some of them volunteered to join the rebels, but others were coerced, abducted or chose combat in desperation as a means of survival (Denov & Maclure, 2009, cited in Zack-Williams, 2012, p.146). There was widespread destruction of the country's social and economic infrastructure as a result of the war (Gberie, 2005; Peters, 2011; Zack-Williams, 2012).

By December 2002, after two unsuccessful phases of Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) had been disrupted by the continuation of violence, the war ended when a third phase of DDR was successful: a total 56,700 combatants (aged eighteen years and over) handed in their weapons at reception centres where they were destroyed by officials (Sesay & Suma, 2009, p.12). They were entitled to receive reinsertion packages, \$150 and to enter skills training and education programmes, but there was less emphasis placed on the importance of reintegration. The report by Sesay and Suma (2009, p.15) for the International Centre for Transitional Justice warned that "Sierra Leone always alienates youth". This observation is important because studies of youth marginalisation propose young people's exclusion from social, economic, and political processes as factors that contribute to social unrest. It is argued this can then lead to the ultimate breakdown of society as the precursor to conflict, as occurred in 1991 (see e.g., Peters, 2011; Zack-Williams, 2012).

With peace secured in 2002 precedence was given to establishing the rule of law and ensuring that the police and armed forces could control any further threat of instability. The next priority was the reconstruction of infrastructure and protection of the mining industry, which before the collapse of commodity prices in 2014-2015 was the largest single contributor to the economy. Women's empowerment was not prioritised during the post-conflict period. This was in spite of the likelihood that women's low status prior to the civil war (1991-2002) encouraged tolerance and acceptance of the atrocities carried out against them during the period of conflict (TRC, 2004). During reconstruction, tensions developed between donors' budgetary timescales, weaknesses in the government, and the requirement for flexibility and adaptation in an extremely fragile social and economic situation. In such circumstances "good

enough” results that were non-compliant with policymakers’ programme criteria with regard to agenda and timeframes had to be accepted (as noted by Grindle in her World Bank report, 2002), otherwise the autonomy of a nascent government ran the risk of being seriously undermined.

In 2002 one in five households were headed by women who suffered conflict-related deprivation and were now entirely responsible for the survival of themselves and their children (ADBG, 2013; SSL, 2004, p. 13). Women were marginalised during the formal peace process; the significance of their role in peace-building and post-conflict reconstruction was not fully recognised and their needs and concerns were unacknowledged. This was in spite of women and children constituting the bulk of the war-impooverished population who were therefore likely to bear greater long-term consequences of the conflict (Zack-Williams, 2012). The GoSL was under immense national and international pressure to re-establish a sound judicial system and to deliver social and economic initiatives within a tight timeframe imposed by international funders including DFID, but the country had extremely weak professional and organisational capacity, and limited financial resources to secure law and order. Thus, as is common in post-conflict situations, the GoSL was obliged to prioritise reconstruction (Grindle, 2002).

Patriarchy, endemic within society and prevalent over centuries, is a primary contributing factor to the diminution of women’s status. However, it is critical to determine the extent to which women are active in perpetuating inequalities by endorsing practices that to the outsider appear oppressive and harmful. Deep-rooted patriarchy is widely regarded (particularly among men) as either natural or as fully sanctioned by custom (TRC, 2004, p.106). I was told by a senior official responsible for the monitoring and evaluation of women’s projects at Oxfam that; “It is common for men to beat their wives it’s the way they demonstrate their love and devotion” (Interview A2), a sentiment that was reiterated by a another senior official, this time in the Family Support Unit (FSU) (Interview B6). Well over 60% of women considered this acceptable, while just over 30% of men had the same view, which suggests either that women play an active role in perpetuating their own oppression or that they have capitulated to domination by men, (Alie, 1995 cited by Taqi, 2010) stated that; “Sierra Leonean women, no matter what their levels of education, are bullied by men who rely on tradition and cultural demands to stifle women’s growth.” Denov and Maclure (2009), based on the analysis of data collected during extended periods of fieldwork between 2000 and 2009, concluded that deep-rooted patriarchy obstructed progress towards gender equality and has perpetuated women’s and girls’ subservience.

However, as I noted earlier in this chapter and discussed in Chapter Two, it is inaccurate to assume that women are defenceless and accept processes that deny them access to resources. There are numerous examples of women who demonstrate varying degrees of agency within the constraints of patriarchal cultural-political structures. Women resist situations they resent, either publicly or 'covertly' and use coping mechanisms to seek alternative routes to access resources through independent activities or through their social networks (see e.g., Leach's description of Mende women living in the Gola forest in Eastern Sierra Leone, 1994, p. 212). This was confirmed in discussions I had with members of women's networks in northern Sierra Leone in Kamaranka, Bombali province, who utilised group support to gradually advance their position. This tactic, a form of agency, was employed by women who at a first encounter appeared to be entirely subjugated (see Chapter Two and the case studies in Chapter Five). In conversation with members of women's groups and women's networks, detailed in Chapter Six, I observed the solidarity they gained through membership of women's groups and women's networks that were building women's confidence which is leading to younger members challenging recognised customs and traditions, such as becoming members of secret societies and going through initiation.

3.3 Societal Groupings & Secret Societies

I now move on from detailing the impact of history on women's status to assessing the degree to which culture and tradition dictate women's position in society. I explore the role of secret societies, their practices and rituals as confirmed in records dating back to the seventeenth century. By the 18th century, most ethnic groups embraced such societies and adopted their practices (Dapper, 1688 cited by Fanthorpe, 2007). Earlier I referred to the initiation process undergone by Madam Yoko in the 19th century, which according to conversations I had with women during fieldwork had hardly changed.

Female secret societies are strictly segregated from the male secret societies (such as the Poro and Kamajor). The separation of the sexes is believed to be an essential part of the process of unleashing inherent spiritual powers, and each group occupies separate, private space in the 'forest' and has a focal 'sacred bush' where initiations take place. Superstition is rife among the male hunter members of Kamajor society. Successful hunting depends on secrecy being maintained regarding their use of hunting medicines, which are believed to render the hunter bullet-proof and invisible. If a woman takes a lover while her husband is away hunting it will result in the spoiling of these medicines. Complex symbolism exists in hunters' laws that

assume women cannot be trusted and can lure men into divulging secrets. In her study of women in the Gola forest in Eastern Sierra Leone, Leach claims that mistrust runs deeper and that Kamajor control of women extends to the symbolic restraint of women through the practice of female genital mutilation (FGM) during initiation (Leach, 1994).

In 2013, '28 Too Many'¹³ (an activist movement that opposes FGM) estimated that almost 90% of women and girls (aged 15-49) had been initiated and belonged to female secret societies (DHS, 2013): the Bondo (in Southern and Eastern districts) and the Sande (in Western area and Northern provinces). In order to conform and become fully active members of their social group girls are expected to go through 'training', which culminates in FGM. In the run up to the 2012 election it was claimed that the First Lady of Sierra Leone had covered the costs of up to 1,000 families' daughters' initiations. Girls and their families come under intense pressure to become members and non-initiates are stigmatised. Pejorative terms are applied to those who are uncut, such as foolish, childish, stupid, 'unpure', and all women's meetings in the village are under the auspices of Bondo. Non-initiates have limited access to networks and to information that is available to Bondo members, and they are expected to treat society members with deference (Bosire, 2012; 28 Too Many, 2014, p. 22.).

FGM¹⁴ marks the end of a girl's puberty, renders her marriageable (often to a far older man) and is central to her rite of passage into womanhood (Fanthorpe, 2007). Training takes place over a period of months, sometimes years, and includes guiding girls in social graces, maintenance of good health and ways of nurturing fertility, knowledge of childbirth and the family: it is directed by Bondo wisdom with its devout spiritual connections (MacCormack, cited in Fanthorpe, 2007, p.7). Initiation ceremonies take place between July and September and are scheduled subject to approval being granted by male chiefs and community elders. Essentially misogynistic due to the physical and psychological damage inflicted on women, FGM is often carried out with non-medical implements in environments without access to medical care (this is discussed later with reference to the interview with 'Mammy Queen').

My data indicates that the Bondo and Sande secret societies endorse patriarchy and practices that prepare girls for a life of servility and encourage them to take on the traditional role of the subservient wife. In some instances, deeply ingrained traditions, such as FGM, prove fatal to women. Women suffering from obstetric fistulas usually caused by tears during childbirth,

¹³ '28' refers to the estimated number of countries that do not have legislation in place to ban FGM.

¹⁴ Type I: excision of the prepuce, with/without excision of part/all of the clitoris. Type II: excision of clitoris with partial/total excision of labia minora. Type III: excision of part/all of external genitalia and stitching/narrowing of vaginal opening (infibulation) (WHO, 1997, p. 1, cited by Bosire, 2012, p. 1).

were traditionally believed to be jinxed and were rejected by their communities (Pigott, 2004). If the condition is left untreated it can render women incontinent and can pose a serious health risk if they go on to have more children. Now, more women are being treated for this serious health issue, but should a woman resist having more children, her husband can threaten to take another wife. Given the important role of deep-rooted cultural-religious cosmologies in society, I question why these topics are missing from mainstream development toolkits and why appropriate programme approaches are not prescribed to reduce the negative impact of these customs. This is reflected in the dearth of recorded data that relates to culture and tradition.

In line with the empirical evidence collected during this study, the customs and rituals of the Bondo and Sande secret societies actively perpetuate women's traditional role. Women are referred to as standing 'behind' men, rather than moving into position 'side by side' with men, as the slogan of the 50/50 women's advocacy group proposes. I propose that in Sierra Leone the importance women attach to their positioning in relation to men represents a contextual explanation of empowerment, interpretations of which I examined in Chapter Two. Women on several occasions referred to an ambition to stand 'side-by-side' rather 'behind' men, and some women told me they wanted to be positioned 'in front of men' (see Chapter Five), which I translate as a desire to become leaders and to achieve equality. During the post-conflict period, elected leaders sought support of the Bondo to regain their hegemony. The Sowe or 'Mammy Queen' (female chief) and head of the Sowe is a powerful and respected figure in the community who occupies leadership and advisory roles and carries out initiations. She is regarded as a 'big woman', a powerful patron who others depend on for political or economic assistance (Leach, 1994, p.60). As such, Soweis are courted by politicians who use them to foster political interests and careers, aware that their support can deliver block votes in elections. Secret societies (chiefs and Sowe) defend traditional culture to forestall changes that could affect privileges they access and react aggressively to any perceived challenge that could undermine their authority. Secrecy (enforced by secret societies) surrounds cultural practices accompanied by a highly charged narrative that the societies exposure leads to its destruction (Bosire, 2013). Pemunta, (2017 raises the matter of infringement of human rights in relation to the issue of FGM as a potential route towards future elimination of the practice, he underscores violations linked to the custom currently being scrutinised. by many who seek its elimination. I conclude by restating that participants on several occasions indicated there was a growth in aggressive and forced initiations.

In the aftermath of the war, functioning as a Soweï offered vital economic opportunities for women to sustain themselves (Bosire, 2013). The Soweï is responsible for carrying out FGM, and the practice stirs up strong emotions and is frequently presented in terms of cultural relativism in a series of (predominantly Western) dichotomies such as traditional/modern, backward/progressive. But this perspective fails to understand how FGM penetrates community life in multifaceted and complicated ways (Bosire, 2012, p.177). While I was investigating cultural matters and local issues I learned, as an outsider who lacked the depth local knowledge and understanding, to refrain from casting an absolute judgement on any aspect of culture or tradition. Eradication advocates need to take account of various dimensions of the Bondo society's embeddedness in relation both to state and society. (Bosire, 2013). Reminding myself to avoid making such judgements was particularly important when I met with Mammy Queen who outlined her responsibilities as follows.

Mammy Queen, a female chief and Soweï, was given the title as the first woman to lead the community in Kaningo, Freetown. She is head of the Bondo female secret society and is responsible for looking after the welfare of her community. Her role is as advisor, dispute mediator and counsellor and health worker; she also assists in securing loans to help local families. Two female researchers accompanying me were unnerved by the visit; both girls were extremely wary of entering her home which had Soweï insignia (a small piece of red cloth) pinned outside and above internal doorways. I persuaded the girls to have a conversation with Mammy Queen after she was reassured that I, as a foreigner likely to be hostile to the practice of FGM, would not cause trouble. The Soweï and her principal advisor preferred not to have a conversation with me; the discussion was in Krio, so I observed, and an explanation was provided by my assistants. Mammy Queen has performed initiations for twenty years. The instruments she uses to carry out FGM are a razor blade and a knife for the cutting off the girl's clitoris. She is paid for her work by the girl's parents. Mammy Queen inherited the 'secret' from her grandmother, and her daughter now carries out initiations under her guidance.

My research assistants told me that when I was absent from the room her son recounted stories of the supernatural; tales of when he was in the forest: a spell was cast on him and he was unable to move, he was completely paralysed and covered in snakes. The researchers were visibly shaken and did not doubt the veracity of his stories. This incident and those I recount in later chapters confirm that belief in the occult is widespread. Fieldwork assistants, both male and female, gave first-hand accounts of being threatened with forced initiation by the Poro (male) and Bondo (female) secret societies. I had several conversations with them concerning

pressures on them to undergo initiation. Two girls referred to spending time at 'summer camp' but no one admitted to having gone through the procedure.

In the course of my fieldwork I became aware that there was less willingness among the younger generation to comply with demands on them to take up membership and go through initiation (see Chapter Six). My observation was that the shift was more significant in urban communities, less so in isolated rural districts. A young woman and a young man each recounted stories of how they had managed to escape from being forcefully initiated. Conversations I had with women and girls to determine if they considered their involvement with secret societies a positive or a negative experience revealed that some among the younger generation were fearful of the power of the Bondo society and the potential harm it could cause them. Others were headstrong and, even when pressured by family or the secret society, some individuals remained determined not to succumb. One young female graduate who lived in Freetown said:

When both young girls and men were illiterate and poorly educated it allowed domination by men [...] Change is happening fast. Women are learning to stand up for their rights.

My research bears out the perception that secret societies in their adherence to traditional practices obstruct rather than support women and girls' progress towards equality and empowerment.

Interview: A1. Experience of Initiation

One young woman, completely unprompted, elected to relate the harrowing story of her forced initiation. Many years after the event she was still traumatised and deeply scarred by her experience. She recounted her experience as follows:

The Bondo society is particularly active in poor communities. There is an oath of secrecy, so it's not spoken about, there is silence on the subject. There has to be political will, right now votes would be lost if people speak out. It is a livelihood matter, but it infringes on human rights, the right to say no. Girls go to the villages for holidays and they are cut there, not willingly. If you are not a member you have no say, you are not involved in decision-making, you are a non-entity, a nobody. I was raised as an English girl, but I was initiated when I was ten years old. No one looked after me, my mother was old. She was a member of the Bondo, but it was solely my father's decision.

There was singing and celebration. I was coerced, forced, traumatised. My father was sick. He called to persuade me to undergo the initiation, so I did. I knew what was happening, I regret going to the bush, I was shocked, and traumatised, my father died when I was there. People sat on my chest, restrained me and cut me. I didn't realise

the gravity of what was taking place. I do not want this for my daughter or my son, I don't want him to be a member of the Poro society. It is devilish, barbaric, it has spiritual implications, it is the work of the devil. I am Christian, it directly hinges on deliverance and darkness. I rarely go back to the village, I see the Sowe activity, I see girls and women who are not empowered. They even initiated a white researcher who went to the village. Once someone is initiated, they will not tell all.

There is some sensitisation on community radio. There are gender specialists attached to State House working with the Soweis. In line with the Child Rights Act, the guidelines are now that the initiation should only happen to girls of 18 and over who have given their consent, but there is no political will. The president makes a statement, the majority vote against the practice but the Soweis are influential in the communities. No one wants to jeopardise votes; the government doesn't want to rock the boat; it needs the votes.

The Soweis are paid for the initiation: it's their living, their profession! There is a lack of freedom in communities. Parents comply, they provide provisions for the girls for three weeks even one month. The Soweis have no alternative source of income; there are economic issues, they need to be trained in other ways of earning a living.

Educated families retain the cultural tag, the traditional culture and pass it on. I believe this practice has spiritual implications. People are cajoled, they even go as far as to suggest it is a white man's idea. In Krio communities they take their children to the gynaecologist proclaiming that FGM will protect them from HIV/AIDS.

(Researcher interview, 2014)

Membership of secret societies lapsed during the war (1991-2002) when populations were transient and fleeing conflict, but there was a resurgence in the post-conflict period in both urban and rural communities. I listened to several accounts of the revival of FGM that suggested violent, forced initiation was becoming commonplace. Community workers, both male and female, who assisted me in my research recounted incidents when they had been posted to rural districts and had found themselves in terrifying situations threatened with obligatory initiation. Similar situations are referred to by Fanthorpe (2007). With the onset of the EVD pandemic in 2014 initiations slumped once more, this time due to fear of infection, and the GoSL appeared to use the opportunity to discourage continuation of the practice by the Bondo and Sande societies. At the time of writing, Sierra Leone had been declared free of the Ebola Virus Disease and proposals were made to raise awareness of the dangers of FGM through education that would actively encourage the practice to cease. With sensitive issues such as FGM, it is essential to engage with those who hold entrenched attitudes and to work collaboratively with them to achieve a shift in culture and practice. As I emphasise throughout this thesis, complexities in all aspects of traditional rituals must be recognised and accorded respect, none more so than those sensitivities attached to the practice of FGM. I agree with the recommendation that reform actors "must get inside the mindsets of supporters of FGM and

tailor the change agenda in ways that capture the imagination of practitioners” (Lundquist, 2004, cited in Bosire, 2012, p. 182). Eradication campaigns need to decipher the layered and complex embeddedness of the Bondo society in political and societal structures (Bosire, 2012, p. 183).

Simply advocating for the abolition of secret societies fails to respect the culture and does not encourage an understanding of how such structures underpin a motivation to survive (Fyle, 1981 & 2011). Some reasons for membership of societies and the mindset that shapes them include the importance of security and a sense of ‘belonging’ to people who are otherwise part of deeply insecure groups: this can be interpreted as an indirect form of empowerment. In extremely poor and unstable populations close groupings such as these provide strength: secret societies, then, represent important support networks for members, granting them a degree of agency. But, irrespective of these positive aspects of secret societies, there is evidence that the rituals and practices dictate that women occupy a traditional role in society that renders them subservient to men and perpetuates their low status, effectively blocking their progression towards equality and empowerment.

3.4 The Complex Role of Societal Groupings

Dislocation and vulnerability caused by displacement creates insecurities that encourage both fear and resistance to change. I was told by a community worker that a government initiative introduced in 2010 to replace traditional birth attendants (TBAs) with midwives was hampered by fear and suspicion among local groups that the move would interfere with established cultural practices that had been passed down through the generations. Later, during the EVD pandemic, traditional funeral rituals that involved washing of infected corpses were banned, which aroused suspicion and resistance once more. Medical personnel were attacked when they attempted to enforce the ban on these traditional funeral rituals.

The resurgence of cultural traditions and practices suggests that the Bondo and Sande secret societies and their associated initiation rituals offer women and girls a sense of belonging and security. In turbulent and uncertain times people seek stability in their lives, and they turn to the familiarity and comfort of ritual knowledge and practices (Shaw, 2002). However, my analysis of the data I collected during fieldwork leads me to conclude that such practices, while they may offer support, can also act as a type of control thus strengthening the already dominant patriarchal structure (Fanthorpe, 2007).

It is suggested that secret societies provide primordial routes through which to re-order community life (Bosire, 2012, p.25). The sacred bush, the process of initiation, and FGM, are complex social techniques, the latter inscribed onto bodies conducted within socially and spatially defined communities. These rituals act as confirmation of permanence and belonging, in this instance for the displaced and traumatised (Appadurai, 1996, p.179). In the post-conflict period secret societies helped establish a sense of community and stability, giving meaning to members of traumatised and displaced populations. In the analysis of my fieldwork data I interpreted the term 'belonging' in both urban (Kanningo, Freetown) and rural (Kamaranka, Bombali) areas as critical to the support of the displaced and those living in newly established neighbourhoods. There was evidence of traditional dependence on the extended 'family', a structure that nurtures everyone in need, which blurs distinctions between family and non-family members. It was evident that women embraced secret societies as another form of solidarity or belonging, and in the absence of a political and economic system committed to promoting women's status they give women authority and provide some with an income.

These groups were by no means homogeneous, nor were they devoid of political allegiances.

Prominent women's groups in Sierra Leone such as 50/50¹⁵ and the Foundation of African Women's Education (FAWE)¹⁶ have been active in galvanising a women's and girls' movement, which they essentially see as a 'feminist struggle' to upgrade women's status. However, the movement was instigated by the educated middle-class who were subject to Western influences and are likely to have adopted Western concepts of feminism. Many Sierra Leonean professionals and academics travel extensively and move freely in international professional circles. They are no longer based in Sierra Leone, and (from conversations with leaders and members of these groups, as discussed in Chapter Five), I observed that while they typically advocate on behalf of poor women, they were less likely to be aware of the true nature of the needs of the disadvantaged.

Members of secret societies have implicit beliefs in superstitions and the power of the occult, and the significance attached to the supernatural has a strong impact on women's lives. The supernatural is constructed around a complex mystical belief system that I propose acts as an additional societal control over women. Within traditional societies, women who were active members of this multi-faceted, deeply held spiritual belief system were enveloped in mystique, and, for example, had the habit of consulting diviners. They carried out separate ritual practices that encouraged men's superstition and fear of such rituals, driving male desire for containment and control over women. It was believed in this extremely superstitious society that women, if set free, had the ability to act as an evil and malign force and could wreak havoc. Wives were viewed as conduits through which threatening external forces passed (Shaw, 2002; Leach, 1994; Fanthorpe, 2007). These fears still exist, and so too does a complex array of cultural practices that effectively contain women and dictate their inferior roles in society. Thus, while membership of secret societies offers security, it simultaneously appears to confirm women's marginalisation.

Witchcraft is used in the context of healing to ameliorate societal problems such as poverty, unemployment, violence and alienation in the hope of producing tangible results; this is a likely explanation for the resurgence in popularity of belief in the occult in recent years. Witchcraft with its focus on kinship and family binds communities that are seeking solutions to problems that otherwise risk dividing people. It is one of the few 'indigenous' means of social

¹⁵ 50/50 was set up in 2001 with the aim of achieving gender equality through training and advocacy. The organisation advocates and campaigns for women's increased political participation and equal representation in parliament.

¹⁶ FAWE is thirty-three SSA countries including Sierra Leone. The organisation focuses on gender responsiveness in education. FAWE functions as a semi-autonomous national NGO and it enhances education of girls and women at all levels with the aim of improving their chances in life.

responsibility available (Chabal & Daloz, 1999, pp. 74-76). I see this subject as key to my understanding of deeply embedded societal issues that have a profound influence on women's lives in Sierra Leone (Shaw, 2012; Fanthorpe, 2007). In the sections that follow, I describe its vivid cosmology, one so forceful that it governs the lives and actions of many people. These beliefs also provide context that frames several of the incidents recounted to me during this study.

Secret societies channel and control the powers of the spirit world, captured in masks and other special artefacts such as 'medicines', also known as 'fetishes.' A range of laws and protocols have to be observed if the cooperation of spirit powers is to be assured, and initiates cannot speak of society affairs to non-initiates nor can non-initiates witness society rituals. People themselves are no less repositories of spiritual power than 'medicines', dead ancestors, or wild creatures from the bush. Claims are made that sources of spiritual power are discovered in dreams, the dreamer being aided in locating power through the ghost of a recently deceased sibling (Fanthorpe, 2007). Interviewees describe experiences that originated in dreams (see Chapter Six), and these accounts reveal insights into how women living in harsh conditions turn to the occult in an attempt to rationalise their place in the world and to navigate their path forward.

These stories resonate with experiences I had on several occasions when individuals recounted stories of actual events through the interweaving of fact with fiction and overlapping explanations of separate incidents and events. I was told of spells being cast that resulted in death, and of people becoming paralysed and unable to move, with snakes crawling over them in the bush - the latter, it was claimed by one research assistant, had been experienced by the president of the country. Individuals were sometimes rendered speechless, as in the case of one person who was called to give evidence in court. Each story was communicated as factual, and when I expressed surprise at the nature of the tales, they were immediately confirmed as being entirely possible. In recent times, the power and influence of societies has been strengthened by their alignment with politics. 'To spoil the country', a phrase with profound meaning, refers to any act that violates laws ordained by ancestors and guarded by the authority of the secret societies. This belief system, though alien to the Western mindset, is integral to many women's lives. I turn next to the work of Shaw (2002), which analyses why such beliefs are so deeply rooted in society and provides some explanation of the purpose they serve.

Shaw's (2002) field study of communities in Sierra Leone led to her interpretation of the evolution of commonly held spiritual beliefs and superstitions as 'memoryscapes': a process of

transmogrifying memories of periods of oppression when human life was reduced to that of a commodity and turning once benign spirits into fearful and threatening forces which populations had to ritually protect themselves against. Traces of these experiences, according to Shaw (2002) are imprinted on each generation, influencing patterns of culture and behaviour which can resurface in times of extreme threat and danger. I concur with Shaw's theory and relate this to the war, during which time it is conceivable that dormant behaviours could be resurrected and re-enacted. Shaw makes a connection with Bourdieu and his sense of 'forgetting' of the past as discursively available history, but by the same token a 'remembering' of it as 'second nature' (Shaw, 2002, pp. 4-5). The slave trade, for example, is forgotten as history but is remembered as spirits; as a menacing landscape, and as imagery in rituals in divination, marriage and witchcraft (Shaw, 2002). Re-workings of traditional and spiritual beliefs that confirm strong affinities with the occult are a powerful force permeating all strata of Sierra Leonean society. Chabal and Daloz state that:

It is essential to study the influence of the occult on political leadership in order to appreciate the extent to which seemingly political decisions may hinge on what we call the irrational.

(Chabal & Daloz, 1999, p.149)

"Witch-finding" - a process of public divination by which persons were transformed into slaves after their conviction as witches - was a method of slave production carried out by the Temne (the dominant tribe in Eastern Sierra Leone) during more than four centuries of Atlantic slave trading. Shaw describes: 'The Place of Witches', 'The Place of Spirits' and 'The Place of the Dead' as located in 'The Invisible City', a hidden region of space that intersects with the visible world of human beings. Shaw was given vivid accounts by different interviewees that were similar in nature. Shaw recounts descriptions of the Place of Witches as:

A prosperous city where skyscrapers adjoin houses of gold and diamonds; Mercedes-Benzes are driven down fine roads; street vendors roast 'beefsticks' (kebabs) of human meat; boutiques sell stylish "witch-gowns" that transform their wearers into animal predators in the human world.; electronics stores sell tape recorders and televisions (more recently VCRs and computers; and witch airports despatch witch planes - planes so fast, I was once told, that "they can fly to London and back within an hour" - to destinations all around the globe

(Shaw, 2002, p. 202)

Collectively these images present a phantasmagorical confection - created from a mix of the past and practices such as barbarism, cannibalism and vampirism - which is transposed into

fantastic, powerful versions of the future. There were stories of ‘witch guns’: weapons made from materials such as a piece of papaya stalk, a grain of sand that was combined with an explosive powder then transformed by the witch into a lethal weapon that could be used to kill victims at a considerable distance (Shaw, 2002, p. 208 & 2010). These are just a few of many images of affluent modernity being mixed with imagery of animal predators and ballistic weapons creating links between history, the future and the occult that can be regarded as providing a commentary on problematic forms of wealth, power, technology and mobility (Shaw, 1997). Shaw regards these beliefs as legacies of the slave trade and cites Richards’s view that these:

new forms of witchcraft and vampirism are a salient commentary on a succession of ‘kleptomaniac regimes’ elite affluence, economic decline and a devastating civil war.

(Richards, 1996, cited in Shaw 2002)

Sowei female chiefs, as noted earlier, are very important figures. They command respect and are influential in the community and it is therefore essential to convince them to use their respected position to achieve positive results. They can play a pivotal role in convincing community members of the importance of girls’ education. They have the authority to guide women and girls in a direction which will truly empower them. But in order to do so, Soweis need to be trained to comprehend the dangers and harm caused by FGM and to understand the need to eliminate the practice. The country director of the Bangladesh Rehabilitation Assistance Committee (BRAC), whose team spends periods of time embedded in remote communities working closely with teenage girls to identify their needs, told me of the enormity of the challenges he and his team face, “We find that local culture and traditional practices are by far the main obstacles we have to surmount before we can make any progress.”

3.5 Conclusion

The legacy of the socio-economic upheavals that Sierra Leone has endured over several centuries have rendered populations (of women) resistant to the imposition of further cycles of alien systems, and this has contributed to an innate mistrust of Western-dominated ‘development’ originating from this era. I develop this notion to propose that Western-inspired international development (see e.g., Galeano, 1997; Escobar, 2015) rekindles long-held memories and patterns of repetition that Shaw (2002) refers to as ‘memoryscapes’. Culture and tradition, exacerbated by entrenched patriarchy, block change and display inherent disrespect for women and girls. In some instances, extremely poor families are forced to actively

encourage girls to work in the sex trade so they can put food on the table (see Chapter Six), a dire situation that is born out of extreme poverty that further denigrates women.

The UN has declared that it opposes the practice of FGM but has asserted that change will be brought about through creating a dialogue with Soweis and working with them. The GoSL has proposed that girls should not be initiated until the age of eighteen, and then, as young adults, they could make a choice. However, during field visits to Bombali in northern Sierra Leone, I found that the reality was very different: girls were going through initiation at a far younger age (sometimes as young as three years) unlike in Senegal and several other African countries that have passed laws banning FGM altogether. The deeply held spiritual beliefs, superstitions, rituals and initiations explored by Evans-Pritchard (1976), Leach (1994), Shaw (2002), Fanthorpe (2007) and Bosire (2012 & 2013) prevail. And this complex aspect of culture and tradition that has a profound and intensely negative impact on women and girls was confirmed in accounts by interviewees who recounted their personal experiences.

Supported by the historical accounts provided in this chapter by Fyfe (1962), Sibthorpe (1970), Alie (1990), Fyfe (2011) and Zack-Williams (2012) I have demonstrated that the decline in women's status began centuries earlier than colonisation and the process has been incremental. The impact of slavery, fed by the practice of witch-finding, patriarchy and its attendant customs, and the protracted period of colonialism with its imposition of Western constructs, were then compounded by the outbreak of the civil conflict in 1991 that disrupted society once more. Sierra Leone's turbulent history and the society's responses to enforced transformation during these periods are principal factors that have led to the erosion of women's status. In this chapter, I have demonstrated that specific periods in Sierra Leone's history have been instrumental in lowering women's status, and I have examined the degree to which cultural beliefs, practices and traditions block women's progress within the patriarchal society.

The practices of the female Bondo and Sande secret societies that insist that girls subscribe to a traditional way of life clash with progression towards equality and empowerment of women and girls. I have shown that there is a close relationship between these practices and the strength of belief in the occult. The Bondo and Sande societies connect closely with forces that combine to inhibit women, including witchcraft and FGM. Despite this, I maintain that the desired transformation in the lives of women and girls can be achieved, but it will be dependent on reducing the dominance of patriarchy and on securing the full sanction and cooperation of the Soweis. The enrolment of girls in school along with reducing (and ultimately eliminating) FGM will also hinge on close collaboration with the Soweis who have the requisite power and

influence to support change that can lead to girls' and women's equality. International development in its current guise, I argue, displays a lack of insight into local culture and traditions and does not fully comprehend the fundamental reasons why women continue to be marginalised in Sierra Leone. The approaches to development that emerge from it therefore struggle to address the needs of those women who are located within the indigenous setting. As Ekiyor and Gbowee, peace activists in West Africa, observed:

West African women who are motivated to employ "women peace activism" strategies to promote social justice in West Africa: [a region that includes Sierra Leone] where the majority of women remain marginalized and excluded from major spheres of decision-making along with efforts to terminate endemic physical and structural violence that exists in these societies. For a positive shift to occur in social attitudes and norms, legislation, political and administrative rules must be enacted.

(Ekiyor & Gbowee, 2005)

4. EDUCATION AND TRAINING AS ROUTES TO EMPOWERMENT

There is a need for a complete overhauling of the present educational system. The prevailing system is a major contributing factor to our current state of industrial and technological backwardness. The education system was originally a colonial imposition, which did not take into consideration the aspirations and needs of our people. The sole intention was to train passive and obedient Africans to man the colonial state structure. What was expected of any serious-minded African ruling class was to radically alter the inherited education immediately after the attainment of independence. In our country, the ruling class simply continued from where the British colonialist left.

(RUF, 1989 cited in Novelli & Higgins, 2017, p. 37)

4.1 Introduction

In Chapter Three I explored the principal historical and cultural factors that have collectively contributed to women's disenfranchisement in Sierra Leone over a period of centuries. This chapter focusses on education and training; two inextricably linked components of development programming that are believed to lead to economic engagement and are frequently cited as key means through which to achieve gender equality. It is proposed that an effective educational structure that is tailored to women's needs will enable them to pursue broader income opportunities, which in turn will translate into an improvement in their socio-economic position and serve to reduce gender inequality (see e.g., Stromquist, 2002; Kabeer, 1992 & 1994). But this hypothesis masks underlying complexities.

Prior to seeking resolutions to problems, the delivery of educational programmes in Sierra Leone (and countries with similar background histories) requires deeper contextual investigation in order to ascertain why certain barriers obstruct successful implementation of initiatives. Major issues include underfunding, insufficient numbers of qualified teachers, inadequate teaching space, lack of teaching materials, gender issues, accessibility to schools, hunger and poor nutrition, and the expense of education. Maclure and Denov (2009). Even if new schools are constructed, 70% of which were destroyed during the war, and teacher recruitment is increased, and efforts are put in place to improve student enrolment, these measures are unlikely to make a significant contribution to gender equality because of "deep seated socio-cultural constraints that exist within education and in the wider social contexts that impact on educational structures and procedures" (Maclure & Denov, 2009 cited in Novelli & Higgins, 2017, pp.34-38).

In this chapter I identify obstacles that women and girls confront with regard to accessing quality education and I analyse the contextual background to the issues. I recommend that African culture should be reinstated at the centre of a revised syllabus that is in tune with the aspirations and current requirements of young adults. I present options that are guided by Stromquist (2002) who applies a gendered perspective that gives insight into particular educational, emotional and psychological issues faced by female students. I present a case study of the Ivor Leigh Memorial School in which students relate their experience of education and discuss their aspirations. I also discuss options that can provide 'quality' education for students without any formal education, those who are late entrants into the system, and the many people who are unsuited to conventional curricula.

4.2 Gender, Culture, & Education in Sierra Leone

In Sierra Leone, cultural issues create obstacles to women's progress. For example:

Arranged marriage; wife inheritance; polygamy; child betrothal; bride price; fertility and prioritising education for boys [...] perpetuate patriarchy and man's dominance over woman.

(Rogers, 2001, p. 45, cited by Taqi, 2010)

For positive change to occur, it is essential that educated groups who have a strong voice and function in an enlightened and open environment take action to moderate traditional practices that obstruct the progress of disadvantaged and uneducated women and girls. One such alliance examined by Taqi in her thesis (2010) is an elite group of educated professional Muslim women who, with the support of The Federation of Muslim Women's Association in Sierra Leone, (FOMWASAL), organise education and training schemes for illiterate female Muslim groups. Muslims comprise 78% of the total population of the country, and in 2015 (the most recent statistic available) female illiteracy was estimated at 37. 7%, (UNESCO, 2018). Three national women's groups - The Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE), The Grassroots Gender Empowerment Movement, and the 50/50 Group - advocate on behalf of women and campaign to achieve women's and girls' equality. They regard girls' education as an aspect of a broad-based feminist movement that connects education to specific actions aimed at challenging the hegemony of patriarchy and gendered violence. Underpinning the approach of these organisations is a focus on education for girls and equitable treatment of women and girls as strategies that will improve women's access to resources, their economic opportunities and their political power (Maclure & Denov, 2009).

A key aim of girls' education when considered as an element of the feminist struggle is to raise consciousness regarding the need for women to come together in a shared effort that gives them the support that they need to contest the gendered inequalities and injustices that are embedded in society (Thorpe, 2009). As Marmot (2015, p. 165) observed, "Gender equity in education is likely to be a reflection of gender equity in society." In order to shed light on the learning and education context in Sierra Leone it is important to consider the historic and enduring challenges that women and girls have faced. During the era of slavery, both boys and girls acquired knowledge informally through participation in ceremonies and rituals, and through imitation and demonstration, while instruction at higher levels was delivered through secret societies. Education was functional and was tailored to the needs of the society of the time. The ethos of learning was to produce honest, respectful, skilled and cooperative individuals who conformed to the social order of the day (Alie, 1990). There was an overlap between tutelage and membership to the secret societies, which contributed to creating coherence across family, clan and ethnic affiliation. It was afforded great importance and so had a strong influence on the make-up of society. Boys belonging to secret societies were taught the basics of medicine, politics, government and economics and some undertook military training, while girls were trained in social manners, homecraft, sex matters and childcare (Alie, 1990, p. 24).

During the 19th century Freetown became the hub of the West African coast, absorbing influxes of settlers from different origins who introduced European influences, languages and customs that blended with the African cultural past of the recaptives (Alie, 1990, pp. 66-67) (see Chapter Three). Krios - an integration of 'Original Settlers', Nova Scotians, Maroons, Liberated Africans and immigrants from the Sierra Leone hinterland that took place between 1850 and 1870 - (Alie, 1990, p. 12) were elevated as an elite group and allowed to achieve professional status as doctors, lawyers, teachers, journalists, clergymen, merchants and traders. They were given responsibility for carrying out much of the colony's administration (Alie, 1990, p. 81-83). Krio women, renowned for their independence, engaged in commercial activities ranging from petty trading to some who became factory owners. By the late 1880s Krio influence had begun to decline as British priorities shifted and Krios were replaced by European administrators. Education was transformed during the colonial period with the introduction of the British system, promoted largely by Christian missionaries who combined education with conversion (Fyle, 2011). The emphasis was on teaching Sierra Leoneans to be "British": they were encouraged to adopt Western values and cultivate a preference for

European goods and services that were considered superior (Alie, 1990, Fyle, 2011). Schools followed a British curriculum with emphasis on maths, English language, European literature and Christianity. Latin, Greek and British and European history were taught in secondary schools, while indigenous culture and traditions were marginalised, referenced only in relation to British colonial expansion (Fyle, 2011).

Girl's schools were established during the colonial period, the first was a grammar school set up in 1845, followed soon after by the Annie Walsh School for Girls in 1849 (GoSL, 2010), which (as noted in Chapter Three) resulted in a shift in the social trajectory of women and girls in the fast-moving and chaotic evolution of Sierra Leonean society. By the mid-20th century, the focus was on expansion and improvement in the quality of secondary and higher education that continued to operate within the British system. By 1961, the year Sierra Leone gained independence, the reality was that only a small fraction of students was eligible for Western education in schools located mainly in urban areas. In the concluding chapter of *A New History of Sierra Leone*, Alie provides a list of educational institutions confirming commitment that prevailed, at that time, to the expansion of education (Alie, 1990). This contrasts with his final paragraph, in which he describes the deplorable state of the country one year before the outbreak of the civil war in 1991 (Alie, 1990, p. 273). Rates of poverty were soaring, and populations were starving and living in desperate circumstances and only 55% of primary school-age children were enrolled in school (National Institute of Health, 2009). The majority of schools were in Freetown and provincial headquarter towns, and in the long-term this exacerbated the social divisions between rural and urban districts and left behind a system that failed to reflect the real needs of the broader population.

Education (and also religion) was dominated by Western philosophies and systems and, as such, it was positioned within a cultural framework but it is to be noted that it was subject to local interpretation and at times it overlapped with the practices of secret societies. Students were obliged to earn or buy 'blessings' from teachers who would then connect them to important social networks that set out an exclusive teacher-student relationship which became even more bizarre in the 1980's. In addition to paying school fees, parents (predominantly among the Mende ethnic group) strove to foster their children with teachers and the children were expected to provide household labour for the teachers who treated them as slaves, often beating them: it was part of the process of becoming 'educated' (Bledsoe, 1992, p. 183, cited by Bolten, 2015, pp. 27-28). The problematic nature of teacher-student relationships is discussed later, but it is mentioned here to draw attention to the historic context of the fundamental

power imbalances in relationships of this kind that remain commonplace today.

In 2000, at a meeting of one hundred and sixty-three countries at the World Education Forum (WEF) in Dakar, the GoSL affirmed its vision of Education for All (EFA), scheduled to be achieved by 2015. In line with its strategy to achieve the target of the second Millennium Development Goal (MDG2) - Universal Primary Education (UPE) - the GoSL declared its full commitment to implementation of the Education Act (2004), which included the abolition of fees and the provision nine years of free and compulsory education: six years of primary school plus three years of junior secondary school (JSS) (Right to Education, 2016, p. 7). This was followed the Education Sector Plan 2007-2015 based on data from the PRSP (2004) and the Country Status Report (2006). Assessment of progress was then reviewed in the Sierra Leone Education Sector Capacity Development Strategy (Right to Education, 2016). But despite legislation to provide the education sector with a robust framework, implementation has continued to be extremely weak.

An estimated 70% of schools were destroyed or severely damaged during the war, and up to 70% of the school-age population were left with limited or no access to education (Novelli & Higgins, 2017, p. 34). In 2002 during the post-conflict period, the GoSL came under pressure to fast-track delivery of basic education through a semi-destroyed infrastructure beset by extreme shortages of qualified teachers and teaching materials. Schools also had to accommodate over-age youth who had missed schooling during the conflict, which meant that each class covered a wide age range of pupils. Young people needed training in basic literacy skills, life skills and vocational training to support their reintegration so that they could secure paid employment. Many were ex-combatants who, deeply traumatised by their experiences, now found themselves socially dislocated, stigmatised and rejected by their communities (PMC, 2009). It was within this fragile situation that the GoSL struggled to deliver Universal Primary Education (UPE), as enshrined in the United Nations Universal Charter on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). It is a basic human right that is broadly recognised as a prime catalyst in the reconstruction of a peaceful society. As noted by Kofi Annan “Education is, quite simply, peace-building by another name. It is the most effective form of defence spending there is” (Annan, 1999).

This posed enormous challenges for the education sector because it lacked capacity and was also widely viewed as extremely corrupt (as will be discussed later in this chapter). UNICEF set up the Community Education Investment Programme, waiving fees and providing uniforms, books and supplies to facilitate school attendance. Educational aid was provided by NGOs and

Community Based Organisations (CBOs), set within the statutory framework that was designed to support national education programmes. The Child Rights Act (CRA), legislation that was introduced in 2007 as a measure that would protect children was followed in 2010 by an implementation and progress review conducted by child rights organisations¹⁷ and submitted to the Universal Periodic Review of Sierra Leone (UPRSL, 2010). The report called for education management to improve at all levels to ensure that it provided quality education as a basic human right to children. It recommended a comprehensive assessment of implementation of the CRA in six key areas. The task of the Gbamanja Commission Report (GCR, 2010) was to assess progress of implementation of the new education policy. The report concluded that a gulf appeared to exist between intention and action (GCR, 2010) To quote Novelli & Higgins, “the national government’s accommodation to IMF macro-economic targets [and] as a result policies continue to be divorced from the reality on the ground” (Novelli & Higgins, 2017, p. 40) The GCR exposed the overall failure of national educational programmes to achieve positive results. A government white paper published in 2011 in response to the GCR made immediate recommendations¹⁸.

The EVD pandemic (2014-2015) revealed the state’s vulnerability. The outbreak of the disease, twelve years after the signing the peace agreement, exposed Sierra Leone’s inability to deliver health and education. But it also simultaneously exposed the failure of the international community to make a rapid response to the crisis and to work within acceptable parameters of cultural sensitivity. Furthermore, it revealed that the basic needs of the population remained unmet. According to 2011 figures, poverty affected 52. 9%, 47.7% lived with food poverty, and 13. 9% endured extreme poverty unable to meet even basic nutritional requirements (GoSL, 2013, pp. 12-14) During the crisis children were denied access to education due to the enforced closure of all educational establishments for most of the academic year. For girls, this resulted in a marked rise in rates of teenage pregnancies as well as an increase in violence

¹⁷ These included a range of organisations working in both rural and urban environments in Sierra Leone: Save the Children UK; War Child Holland; Child Fund; YMCA; Christian Brothers; Goal; AMNet; Caritas; Community Concern Network; Pikin to Pikin; Children’s Advocacy Production; Children’s Forum Network; Youth Partnership for Development and Peace.

¹⁸ Provision of free and compulsory primary education in both policy and practice, establishment of Teaching Service Commission with review of conditions of service of teachers (priority), Establishment of the national institute of education, training and research by legislation as a semi-autonomous specialized agency for curriculum development, teacher development and educational research with study of special needs education as priority, implementation of recommendations of the WACE Chief Examiner’s Report on schools, submission of annual reports on outcomes of implementation, criminalization of the practice of irregular admission of pupils in secondary schools, banning of ‘Access’ courses in tertiary institutions (Cambayma, 2017).

against women and girls (VAWG). Women suffered most as the main carers, they were stigmatised during periods of imposed quarantine when freedom of movement was curtailed. A lock-down prohibiting all movement was imposed for several days in an attempt to control the spread of the virus, and tensions and mistrust arose within communities and between community members as recounted to me by members of local groups during a brief return visit I made to northern Sierra Leone in 2017. Academic institutions reopened in 2015 and 2016 when the country was finally declared free of EVD, and school fees, where applicable, were waived. However, because of increased poverty arising from markets being closed, work being suspended, and movement being curtailed during the EVD outbreak, the poorest families would not be able to cover costs that would allow of their children to resume their education.

During the pandemic, in spite of significant donor funding specifically allocated to healthcare, the GoSL failed to set up a robust healthcare structure amid allegations of misappropriation of funds (Fofana, 2017). On 14 August 2017 a further catastrophe befell the population of Freetown when a gigantic mudslide occurred, causing the deaths of an estimated 1,000 people as well as displacing 6,000 families. The disaster was caused by destabilisation of the hillsides, which was largely the result of the authorities neglecting to control deforestation which was compounded by unregulated building works in the region (Gibbens, 2017; Glynn, 2018). I refer to such catastrophes in order to draw attention to Sierra Leone's particular vulnerability to calamities that severely affect the most disadvantaged, the majority of whom are women and children. A primary strand of this thesis is the assertion that successful development structures must be rooted in the 'local context'. This is supported by McDonald (2012) in relation to education, He stresses the importance of contextualisation when 'policy borrowing'¹⁹ occurs and emphasises that sensitivity to context is key to the success of policy. Training ought to be set within a cultural frame of reference, and there is a need for the culture of the recipient country to be embedded in planning. McDonald (2012) adds that local ownership, the importance of which he declares is underestimated, is necessary if programming is to have a chance of becoming sustainable. McDonald references key issues highlighted in a report by Action Aid (2006), including that donor-driven aid is tied to donor control of projects that are structured to meet geopolitical and commercial interests. There is a lack of local ownership; technical assistance projects often overlook indigenous knowledge, information and skills and

¹⁹ McDonald uses the term 'policy borrowing' when discussing sensitivity required to implement policy taking it from its original source and embedding it successfully in a local culture (2012, p.1821 – 1822). McDonald conducted his research in Samoa but it is an observation that applies to development practice elsewhere, including Sierra Leone.

context-specific solutions (McDonald, 2012). Novelli and Higgins (2017, p. 37) draw attention to the global agendas of international aid organisations and their narrow framing of education policy and programming, which they view as undermining education's transformatory potential. They go on to assert that internationally funded education programmes that follow the 'liberal' peacebuilding model (such as those in operation in Sierra Leone) lack awareness of context and therefore fail to be transformative.

At the very core of context lies the reinstatement of African history and culture in the school curriculum, which presents particular challenges within the dominant and repressive patriarchal structure prevalent in Sierra Leone. Woolman draws on his research in Kenya, Mali, Mozambique and Nigeria in his discussion of educational reconstruction:

African educators in the 21st century face the challenge of creating multi-purpose systems that preserve the multi-cultural social fabric of each country in the context of national inclusion and unity.

(Woolman, 2001, p. 43)

Woolman looks to the future and (subject to strengthening of democracy) advocates for curricula that focusses on greater participation, critical thinking, problem-solving and non-authoritarian teaching methods (Woolman, 2001, p. 41).

In late 19th century Sierra Leone, James Johnson, a devout Christian, was already warning of mission schools' neglect of African culture and history (Woolman, 2001, p. 29). Shizha (2013, p. 3) cautions that knowledge creation - as was the case during the colonial era - is directed largely by those who control the political and ideological agenda. In many colonised African countries colonial administrative and educational structures (as well as curricula) continued post-independence and were perpetuated by Western-educated African leaders whose philosophies were based on colonial philosophical and ideological tenets. Now attempts are being made to reinstate African beliefs and values. In recent times there has been a move to reclaim and respect indigenous knowledge (IK), reversing the long-term suppression of African culture and tradition. Shizha (2013, pp. 1-14) asserts that reforms in post-colonial curricula should reclaim IK, which has been long suppressed during periods of colonialism. He asserts that systems of education in Africa should be inclusive and that pedagogical practices should be culturally sensitive with reality being constructed from different cultural and historic moments. Woolman (2001, p. 18) echoes these sentiments, asserting that in order to optimise the efficacy of contemporary education it has to combine the values and strengths of traditional culture with the knowledge and skills required to function in the new conditions of modern life.

Indigenous meanings and practices rooted in tradition highlight the perennial tensions between tradition and modernity, and show how these can affect younger generations, particularly women and girls. In recent years, the rights of indigenous peoples to maintain their cultures and traditions have begun to be recognised. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007), Article 14.1 states:

Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning

(United Nations, 2007, p. 7)

And Article 15.1 states:

Indigenous peoples have the right to the dignity and diversity of their cultures, traditions, histories and aspirations which shall be appropriately reflected in education and public information.

(United Nations, 2007, p. 7)

Indigenous people, defined as those who originate or occur naturally in a particular place (OED, 2008, p. 515) are often a minority in their land and are considered homogeneous by the outsider rather than being understood as belonging to widely varying social and ethnic groupings, languages, customs and practices (Shizha, 2010). For example, in Sierra Leone there are sixteen tribal groupings (WPR, 2019). Mass movements of conflict-affected populations has resulted in displacement with influxes creating new settlements that comprise a mix of indigenous tribal groupings. My observations and interactions during research in urban and rural communities indicated that there was strong commitment to re-establishing a traditional way of life that prioritised the group and community allegiances rather than individual-based practices. Systems of collective participation extended to social matters, political issues, working methods, and moral and spiritual beliefs and practices. Learning, for example, followed traditional practice through observation and imitation in a manner that resonated with the approaches propounded in earlier decades by Illich (1970) and Freire (1970), and also later by Woolman (2001, p. 29).

Group interests were placed above personal interest, as in the practice of 'Osusu' (Fyle cited in Falola & Childs, 2004), the custom of community members helping each other, whereby group members would collectively make provision for others who were struggling, providing them with food and shelter. Produce was shared among members of the community in times of hardship. In one instance, a young, unmarried, male house keeper I knew well, who earned a modest salary took responsibility for providing a home for two orphaned children, who may or may not have been distant relatives, he bore the cost of feeding and clothing them and sending them to school. Another Sierra Leonean friend fed homeless children each night in her house. Osusu, I observed, was also practiced in micro-credit systems, a tradition based on core values that are important to preserve through an education system that is sensitive and respectful towards cultural principles.

Next, I evaluate Indigenous Knowledge (IK) which I propose can support populations who have no experience of formal education. The aim of IK educational programmes is to harmonise with holistic community cultural values, systems and practices as they are carried out in the village. Freire's practice was to send trained teachers into villages where using a blackboard they familiarised people with how to read and write key words that related to important issues affecting their lives such as access to wells and matters relating to debt. As villagers became literate, their confidence and social awareness increased and they became politically active (Freire cited by Illich, 1971). These philosophies were propounded by Nyerere (1968) in Tanzania, and Kenyatta (1965) in Kenya, the first post-independence presidents of their respective countries, who each envisaged an equal society created through indigenisation of education that taught respect for human dignity and sharing of resources based upon fostering indigenous discourse. In the longer-term Tanzania failed to embrace indigenisation, instead turning to a Eurocentric approach (Shizha, 2010, pp. 10-11). IK in Kenya, despite Kenyatta's belief that traditional education based on maintaining traditional family structures was the key to stabilisation of society that would otherwise descend into chaos, also faltered. Though commendable principles, communities regarded them as methods of restricting their progress (Shizha, 2013, p.12). As such, there was reluctance to fully embrace indigenous structures and curricula in preference of vestiges of the colonial system, which was still regarded by many as superior, and in the case of Tanzania, favouring a Eurocentric approach that was at odds with indigenous practices (Shizha, 2013, p. 13)

Tanzania and Kenya are both examples of colonised countries that have encountered challenges in the development of education models post-independence. Governments and policy makers have struggled to find appropriate educational models that would benefit populations who are under threat from the infiltration of globalisation dominated by multi-national corporations, and also by the influence of international agencies and civil society organisations (Nsibambi, 2001, cited by Shizha, 2013, p. 4). Problems have arisen in establishing a cohesive relationship between traditional and modern, Western and indigenous education systems. Research is required that examines methods of integration between IK and Western knowledge, between tradition and modernity, and ways in which harmony can be achieved within a contemporary environment that will inform future education programmes.

Research presented in Chapter Three highlighted the belief systems that spanned cosmologies, spiritual beliefs and ontological experiences that are generally situated outside of Western understanding (Leach, 1994; Shaw, 2002) (see also interviews in Chapter Six). To be of benefit, learning processes need to demonstrate sensitivity towards such different ways of knowing, perceiving and interpreting the world (Illich, 1971; Freire, 1970). In practice, especially in African countries such as Sierra Leone, the task of education is to embrace perspectives that reflect the history and recent experiences of the specific society. Curricula content needs to leave behind vestiges of the colonial system that do not relate to students' lives (Bolten, 2015) in favour of re-instating narratives, stories, images, historical events, national symbols and rituals, that give meaning to society (Shizha, 2005).

I propose attention requires to be given to the introduction of cultural representation into the curriculum. African history and culture, languages, practices, habits and customs side-lined and regarded as inferior by British colonialists have an important function in education and in the construction of 'multi-purpose systems that preserve the multi-cultural social fabric [...] in the context of national inclusion and unity' (Woolman, 2001, p. 43). I highlight the need for support in the construction of identities with greater self-esteem referred to by Grindle (2002) and Stromquist (2002) and I propose that this will be aided by pride in and broader knowledge of history and culture from a Sierra Leonean perspective as advocated by interviewee C 14, chapter 5. 'Re-evaluation of traditional education is part of a process of reclaiming cultural identity with deeper roots in authentic African traditions' (Woolman, 2001, p. 31).

A balance has to be struck between respect for indigenous knowledge (IK) and allegiances that harmonise with community and public debate concerning harmful cultural practices such as FGM that will lead to modification (and eventual eradication) of such customs that are

sanctioned by chiefs and carried out by the Soweï in the community.

As noted in previous chapters, weaknesses in international development policy and practice are exposed through an evident lack of contextual knowledge of the local environment. I move on to consider integration of IK into national curricula as a constructive method of reclaiming respect for traditional belief systems. A successful shift that embraces African-based educational structures and curricula and strengthens the ability of the region to confront and find ways of interacting with Western-biased discourse. Many of the authors cited so far (Escobar, Estava, Latouche, Mignolo, Kabeer, and Shiva) propose routes of progression that diverge from prevailing development policies and practices. Education occupies a central position in this debate as it is understood to be a fundamental principle of development. And in today's globalised world, curricula are required to be respectful of culture and tradition in a way that creates a comprehensive and sustainable structure that successfully equips young people with the skills they need to compete in the modern workplace. As Illich observed:

A good educational system should have three purposes: it should provide all who want to learn with access to available resources at any time in their lives; empower all who want to share what they know to find those who want to learn it from them and finally furnish all who want to present an issue to the public with the opportunity to make their challenge known.

(Illich, 1970, p. 75)

The Latin derivation of education suggests two meanings: *educare* - to train or to mould, and *educere* - to lead out (Bass, Randall & Good, 2004, p. 1). The first of these implies a passive attitude towards education, while the second suggests an approach that encourages creativity as a route of progression. I assert the latter is appropriate in the context of Sierra Leone where many young people have never attended school and where people's education has been interrupted by conflict. It is essential to formulate and deliver suitable programmes that fully engage students and support them in reaching their full potential.

I draw here on the philosophies of Illich (1971) that not only endure but, I believe, offer insight into current approaches to education that can be applied to women and girls in this study. Illich believed in learning as a human activity and asserted that learning critical skills takes place throughout life in unstructured ways, as is the case for children who do not experience formal education. Illich was, in fact, disparaging of formal education, regarding existing systems as preparation for the student to become a member of the packaged consumer society (Illich, 1971). Instead he advocated for "deschooling" in an environment where citizens interact and develop a critical education with learning based on skills training and competence-based testing.

In Sierra Leone, for learning to be of benefit it must focus on vocational training within an environment that endows students with practical skills that enable them to advance within the society in which they will function. “Problem-posing” as advocated by Freire (1970) - another enduring pedagogue - an approach whereby teacher and student work together to solve problems, is also worthy of consideration. Freire’s other proposals, such as student-teachers and teacher-students, although radical even now, could be modified so that they would encourage participation and open debate.

Context, as I stress throughout this thesis, is crucial in the process of planning and implementing of (in this instance education) initiatives that are intended to be supportive of disadvantaged groups and improve impact and outcomes. Due to the conflict, education - in common with the other principal sectors of government and indeed society in general - was forced to embark upon a process of major reconstruction starting from the most basic level. It is important to give consideration to the philosophies of theorists such as Illich, as I proposed in Chapter Two, and to do so within a framework that acknowledges that women and girls have extraordinary life experiences (many unwished for) and little or no experience of education. Illich, who promoted respect for the value of innate knowledge, was a vehement critic of formal educational systems that favour exam results as the sole measure of academic acumen (Illich, 1970).

4.3 Problems & Promise: Educating Girls in Sierra Leone

Denov and Maclure (2009, pp. 612-620) during extended periods of fieldwork in Sierra Leone between 2000 and 2009 recorded minimal progression towards women and girl’s equality, and they attributed the slow pace of progress to disconnects between education and employment. Their research concluded that unemployment affects girls disproportionately within the fragile economy of the country because it is dominated by a patriarchal structure. Parents generally prioritised boy’s education, considering them a better investment than girls who would leave the family home when they married and had children. In pursuit of a clearer understanding of the educational structures that are required to support the advancement of traumatised, displaced and/or recently resettled women and girls, Stromquist’s (2002) observations from a gendered perspective are important sources of insight. She is critical of the nature, structure and content of educational initiatives as well as the presumption that education (whatever the format) is the solution. Woolman asserts that tensions exist between gender and culture, between traditional African education that sits in opposition to gender equality, that it can act

to reinforce patriarchal power rather than presenting a challenge to it. (Woolman, 2001, p.40-41) – research is required into this broad-ranging and deeply complex issue in collaboration with local and official actors who are conversant with the culture in order to seek a way forward.

Stromquist (2002, p. 23) argues that for education to be of benefit, it must form part of “persistent and long-term interventions”, and highlights fundamental issues, including problems of low self-worth and dependence that have to be addressed before offering solutions. She states that new personalities have to be constructed with a realistic understanding of gender within the society and how to modify it. Stromquist also highlights the fact that solutions to issues affecting women and girls are to be found through first gaining insight into core issues resulting from life experience that can then be followed up with specialist input (Stromquist, 2002). In Sierra Leone trauma has only recently been recognised as an issue and is now beginning to be integrated into the development agenda. It is also being introduced into educational curricula that engage with adults whose lives have been devastated by conflict and displacement, and for whom the priority is survival and the expansion of their livelihood options. Work in this area is being extended to support out-of-school children.

On the question of empowerment and its many interpretations (as discussed in Chapter Two), Stromquist offers her own definition, which consists of four interlocking dimensions:

These are the cognitive (critical understanding of one's reality), the psychological (feeling of self-esteem), the political (awareness of power inequalities and the ability to organize and mobilize) and the economic (capacity to generate independent income).

(Stromquist, 2002, pp. 22-23)

Thus, if education is to be truly empowering it must challenge the patriarchy that governs all four of these measurements. The system must link with women whose needs are currently met through the support they derive from membership of women's self-help groups (SHGs) and networks. In Chapter Six I give examples of several women who became sufficiently empowered to leave relationships in which they were subjugated within patriarchal communities. Husbands struggled (and on occasion failed) to cope with their newly emancipated wives. I observed that women's groups and networks afforded the women separate space and time to question their situation and develop their critical thinking. Extending support for women, the Mwana Mwendu project started in Kenya, 1997, provides childcare, education and support for teenage mothers affected by HIV/AIDS and children aged up to

three years. It trains parents in child and youth development, community development and participatory processes. Pre-school teachers are trained to a professional level, and the system strengthens traditional community structures dependent on the support of the extended family (Engle, Dunkelberg & Issa, 2006, p. 291). The importance of early years support for families and children is gaining recognition in Sierra Leone and may be introduced as part of the GoSL Free Quality Education Scheme announced in 2018. Stromquist (1995) demonstrated an awareness of the spectrum of exclusion that disenfranchised women and girls suffer, noting some of the principal challenges they face. Her hypothesis proposes that their route to inclusion is through an educational setting that embodies a graduated and gender-sensitive curriculum that focuses on realising the four dimensions of empowerment as detailed above. This structure challenges patriarchal ideologies and proposes a vision of a future set within a gender-free society. While in the short term these goals seem completely unachievable, it is to be hoped in the future that they will be incorporated into longer-term policy. My focus on Stromquist's theories is based on my contention that she offers a uniquely gendered perspective in which she proposes insightful and constructive proposals that can assist in resolving issues that, at present, block routes of women and girl's progression. Freire, whose views were born of his experience of exclusion imposed by poverty, stated that, "my social condition didn't allow me to have an education", and he regarded education as, "the means by which men and women deal critically with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world" (Freire cited in Gadotti, 1994, p. 5). In this statement Freire precisely encapsulates the central position that education occupies in making progress towards empowerment for the participants in this study. Willms also recognised the functional importance of literacy. He described it as:

The individual's ability to "use printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one's goals and to develop one's knowledge and potential". It matters for economic success, health and well-being.

(Willms cited by Marmot 2015, p. 236)

4.4 Restructuring Education: Reinstatement of African Culture

Education in the Mano River Union (MRU) - made up of Liberia, Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire along with Sierra Leone - is going through a period of transition. In 1973²⁰ the group created

²⁰ The Mano River Union (MRU) is regional integration organisation created in 1973 between Liberia and Sierra Leone, enlarged by accession of Republic of Guinea (1980) and Republic of Cote D'Ivoire in 2008. It aimed to integrate economies and coordinate development programmes in peace building as a prerequisite to development of industry, energy, agriculture, natural resources, transport and tele-communications and financial affairs - all aspects of economic and social life of Member States (official

inter-governmental institutions as tools that would facilitate social and economic development. Across the region states that have endured similarly devastating periods of conflict and disruption are restructuring education as an instrument that will advance their socio-economic position. Functioning collectively they are working towards standardisation of systems that will enable them to gain access to global markets. Ajayi, Goma and Johnson (cited by Woolman, 1996, pp. 192-194) identified health and social issues that need to be addressed in school programmes including elimination of disease, hunger, ignorance and poverty, reduction of crime and violence, protection of the environment and strengthening of democracy, building respect for indigenous African culture and national integration with preservation of cultural diversity. I strongly recommend that educational programming in Sierra Leone looks to the basics and adopts these fundamental issues as core principles in its revised curriculum, the review of which commenced in colleges and universities in 2016.

Revision of national curricula was led by Milton Margai College of Education and Technology (MMCET). It proposed that students should study a wide-ranging and flexible curriculum, within a learning environment that reflected international standards and equipped graduates with appropriate skills to compete in the work place (Awoko, 2016). In August 2018 newly-elected president Maada Bio announced the launch of the Free Quality School Education Programme. He stated that the GoSL pledged to dedicate 21% of GNP to education (Education for Development, 2018 , p. 4). The Global Partnership for Education has provided a grant to run a 4 year programme for children aged three to five years in recognition of the importance of the role of early learning (linked to SDG 4) (Awoko, 2019). The reconstructive perspective formalises the situation described in the previous section. It is an approach to education that aims to strike a balance between the requirements of delivering contemporary education that equips students with the knowledge and skills they require in order to prosper in the society they live in while also including teaching that will respect and foster traditional cultural values and strengths. Reconstructivism, in this instance, proposes the rediscovery of the roots of African identity and treats education as the agency of cultural transmission and change: it is a model of education that supports nation-building dynamism that is constantly modified by new conditions.

website Mano River Union). A decision was taken in 2008 to revive the Union (Wathi, 2017; UNESCO, 2019).

Indigenous knowledge is the local knowledge - knowledge that is unique to a given culture or society. IK contrasts with the international knowledge system generated by universities, research institutions and private firms. It is the basis for local-level decision making in agriculture health care, food preparation, education, natural-resource management and a host of other activities in rural communities.

(Warren, 1991 quoted in Shizha 2010, p.1)

4.5 Gendered Education: A Case Study of the Ivor Leigh Memorial School

I use a case study of the Ivor Leigh Memorial School (ILMS) in Kaningo to illustrate the socio-economic context of girl's education and to examine more closely the social position of women and girls in Sierra Leone. I consider whether girl's aspirations are being met using this research as my main reference point. Fieldwork I conducted in ILMS and several other schools in Kaningo confirmed that girls are challenged by the educational, cultural and economic restrictions that I detail below (as also noted by Denov & Maclure, 2009). ILMS was set up in Kaningo in 2006 in a roofless, makeshift building (Image 3.) to provide a safe haven for children in the district and in 2009 building started on a new school in collaboration with architectural students from London LMU. This was a joint project in which local workers and trainee architects from London Metropolitan University (LMU) shared skills. The school opened in 2011 with sixty-five children enrolled. Initially free, the school struggled to survive and was forced to introduce fees to cover overheads, maintenance, teachers' salaries and materials.



Image 3. Ivor Leigh Memorial School (ILMS) classroom interior, original building
(Photo: Sandra Wolton, 2009)

In London in 2018, I was given an update by Interviewee F, a Sierra Leonean founding member of ILMS who set up CESO with her nephew in memory of her brother who lived in Kaningo. She lives with her family in London and travels to Sierra Leone as regularly as possible, organising events in London supported by the Sierra Leonean diaspora to raise money to ensure the survival of the school.

In 2013 we applied for government-assisted status to pay teachers' salaries, but five years later the process has still not been completed. The school continues to function reliant on aid, charitable donations and fundraising, mainly through the work of the Sierra Leonean diaspora based in the UK. We award informal scholarships to families, who are particularly in need of support (when we can) so that the children can continue their education. Some extra financial support also comes from Marimbo Women's Association in Kaningo, with proceeds from a micro-credit project set up by the group. In 2017, 300 children were enrolled, but the number dropped to 90 in September 2018 as a result of the introduction of the free education policy for which only government-assisted schools were eligible.

ILMS expected more students to arrive before the start of the new school year in September. Meanwhile the school was still waiting for a response regarding its 2013 application to become government-assisted.

[...]

A shift system is in place, whereby younger children attend classes in the morning and older students come to school in the afternoon. Many students work from early morning and arrive to class hungry and tired. Teachers look for signs of exhaustion as some can from time to time appear dazed or even fall asleep in class. We provide such meals as we can from available donations in an attempt to sustain the hungry children who have to travel from afar to get to school.

The picture and statement above echoes Freire's reflection on his experience of hunger and how it affected his learning. He said, "I didn't understand anything because of my hunger. I wasn't dumb. It wasn't lack of interest" (Freire cited in Gadotti, 1994, p. 5). The interviewee went on to outline the support that the ILMS gave to community members and their children:

We are relied upon for social as well as educational support by many families in the community who are extremely poor. A particular social issue is the problem of grooming which happens to vulnerable girls (and also their families). Older men befriend families and offer funding to 'look after' girls. They make connections with the family and the girl may find herself under pressure (from her family) to make a positive response to the man who offers 'kindness'. Related to this is teenage pregnancy, which is a major problem. Occasionally girls in primary school as young as ten or eleven become pregnant.

She continued to detail the proposals and plans that were in the pipeline.

We need government assistance to guarantee the school's survival, and funding is needed to provide resources that would ensure students reached their full potential. We need an early years specialist and funding to set up an advisory structure that can give information on routes of progression and career options plus a work placement scheme. Our plans are to link with social work students at MMCET so we can set up a system of work experience and prepare students for the workplace. We have also embarked on an international collaborative scheme, partnering once more with trainee architects from LMU, this time on a project designed to customise a container that will provide space to accommodate the nursery.

(Researcher interview with ILMS founding member, August, 2018)

Teenage girl students at ILMS who participated in focus group discussions outlined plans to pursue careers, they expressed strong desires to live independently of men - a complete departure from traditional life in their communities. Members of the group wanted to progress to further and higher education and had aspirational, professional career choices. The majority wanted to qualify as lawyers and accountants, and several wanted to become journalists. But at the time of writing they still lacked access to the quality of educational guidance, careers advice and professional input required to make these choices a reality; they were severely restricted by the pressure to comply with culture and tradition. Girls tended to favour careers that would benefit their country as well as themselves, they expressed feelings of moral obligation to participate in eradicating corruption. They volunteered that they wanted to play an active role in creating a fair and equitable society (focus group discussion conducted by the researcher, 2014).

Primary school enrolment as of January 2019 was reported at 82% and completion rates were an estimated 67%. However, retention rates for girls decrease sharply each year and primary school completion is only 65% for girls compared to 68% for boys. Upper secondary level enrolment is 32% for boys compared to only 14% for girls. Denov and Maclure (2009) heavily criticised Sierra Leone's "rapid school expansion" programme, insisting that, despite increases in female school enrolment, the initiative largely reconstructed the pre-war system. It was therefore unlikely to alter women and girl's status or welfare. They argued that it only served to reinforce the deeply embedded patriarchal social system that perpetuates female inequality. Low retention rates leave girls vulnerable to early marriage and teenage pregnancy, rates of which are prevalent in urban communities with even higher rates in rural areas (which rose during the EVD pandemic in 2014-2015). A divide exists in girls' access to education between Freetown and the provinces, where in some districts an estimated one in three girls attend

school and of those enrolled 60% do not complete primary school (ICAI, 2018). Kofi Annan aptly observed with regard to the importance of girl's education that:

Study after study has taught us that there is no tool for development more effective than the education of girls. No other policy is as likely to raise economic productivity, lower infant and maternal mortality, improve nutrition and promote health, including the prevention of HIV/AIDS."

(Annan, UN Secretary-General, 2003)

The UK provided £355 million towards the The Girls' Education Challenge (GEC) 2012-2016, which was set up to increase levels of girls' enrolment. The focus of the initiative was on provision of education for out-of-school girls in twenty-one DFID priority countries. Plan International received £6,417,465 and BRAC International received £8,015,227 from the fund to make three years' education available in 250 Second-Chance Community Girl's schools in twelve target areas in Sierra Leone (IDC, 2014). Earlier, in 2009, research conducted by Maclure and Danov concluded that an increase in girls' enrolment levels in the national UPE scheme did not correspond with a rise in retention and completion rates. This meant that there was only a negligible reduction in levels of inequality or improvement in women's and girls' economic security and support provided for school-age girls to realise their aspirations was insufficient. Thus, despite measures intended to improve standards being backed by a raft of legislation and significant funding, there was little improvement in delivery and results. ICAI in its 2016 report *Accessing, Staying and Succeeding in basic education - UK Aid's Support to Marginalised Girls*, concluded that irrespective of DFID's strong commitment to tackling (marginalised) girl's education, its various activities did not add up to a coherent strategic approach to tackling marginalisation. (ICAI, 2016, p. 39). In the next section, I move on to discuss the curriculum and characteristics of an appropriate literacy programme suited to the needs of adults as well as school-age children.

4.6 Gendered Education: Literacy as an Enabling Tool

An effective reconstruction of the educational system in Sierra Leone requires the curriculum to reflect the needs of today's female and male students equally with prominence given to functional literacy programming that ties in with livelihoods. Examples include Saptagram (Bangladesh) and the Women's Enterprise Development Programme (Philippines) which focus on content and vocabulary that are relevant to topics of everyday importance such as health, nutrition, childcare, hygiene and sanitation (World Bank, 2006). Dialogue is centred around words and themes that have deep local resonance and is sensitive to the needs of students who

have little or no experience of an educational environment. Numeracy is key, as is the provision of vocational training that links directly to the expansion of livelihood prospects

In Sierra Leone in 2011, 2012 and 2014, I met women's groups who operated rudimentary savings schemes in villages in the Bombali province. My observation was that the villagers were in urgent need of this type of literacy and numeracy programme, as well as training in how to set up and manage bank accounts, loans and savings schemes so they could establish a regularised system that would benefit everyone. Each member contributed a sum of money, however small, on a regular basis. Loans were available from the fund on a rotating basis and were used to pay for school fees, medical care, weddings, funerals, farming materials, and food. In times of crisis, funds could also be used for other sudden and unexpected expenditures and priority was given to families in dire need. Each group appointed a president, a chairperson and a treasurer who was responsible for looking after the money and community members helped to manage the system. There were no fixed guidelines for groups to follow, which meant that terms of borrowing, and the period and rates of interest varied enormously as did punishment for non or late repayment.

In some instances, loans were granted for short periods of time with extremely high interest rates meaning that borrowers racked up even more debt and could not avoid penalties, which added to financial woes rather than alleviating them. Training was also needed to take it to the next level, with information being made available on how to set up and manage bank accounts, how to establish and run micro-credit schemes that would provide funding to allow women to structure (and in due course expand) small businesses. Critics of these schemes, such as Goetz and Gupta (1996, p. 1-46), have argued that women are already overburdened and take responsibility for repayment of the loans that are mainly used by men. As such, micro-credit adds to their responsibilities putting them under additional pressure. They argue that the problems run far deeper, are more complex, and will take time to address, and doing so requires a shift in attitudes with regard to women's social positioning. Similar problems are highlighted by Norwood (2014), who is otherwise generally positive regarding the benefits of microcredit schemes.

World society theorists have argued that a single global model of schooling has spread throughout the world as part of the diffusion of a more general culturally embedded model of the nation state (Anderson-Levitt, 2003, cited by Verger, Novelli, & Altinyelken, 2018, p. 10). Nation states, including those in the Mano River group, are expanding schooling as part of a broader process of adherence to the global models of the organisation of sovereignty (i.e., the

modern state) and the organisation of society as composed of individuals (i.e., the modern nation). It is difficult to imagine commonalities between global concepts of education and interpretations of education that can be applied in Sierra Leone, but as Kabeer (1999) observed, each level is inter-related and to a greater or lesser degree is positioned within the globalised world. Education spans national, regional and global movements, and as such it cannot function exclusively within the local context. But there is also a risk that in the globalised economy education moves towards becoming wholly concerned with economic competitiveness and performance and for this purpose education and knowledge come to be regarded as key competitive assets (Brown & Lauder, 1996; Caroy & Rhoten, 2002). Prompted by Illich (2018) I caution against the potential dangers of homogenisation of education. Tensions inevitably arise at different stages in the process that require a balance to be struck. The influence of global educational policies is deep and far-reaching, with socio-economic implications that directly affect local populations who may be vulnerable to exploitation. An example of this is the undervaluation of land they sell to agro-business extractive industries or for sand mining, both of which also damage the environment (I observed the impact of these activities during fieldwork). For the reasons highlighted above, education interventions must demonstrate sensitivity to context not only to protect populations but equally to protect the environment.

Several education models that are gaining momentum within the international development forum must be considered in the formulation of an educational structure to be applied in Sierra Leone. Competency-based Education (CBE), considered within the framework of Global Education Policy (GEP), is worthy of consideration as an educational structure that is suitable for students who do not attend school. Tromp (2018, p. 162) summarises CBE as “focusing on what learners can do with their knowledge rather than what they know.” Pioneered in Mexico, CBE proposes a holistic conceptualisation of education which underscores measurable outcomes based on observation and objectivity. The aim is to produce human capital in the form of knowledge, skills, attitudes and certain values so that students entering the workplace are equipped to resolve specific problems of personal, public and professional life. A CBE approach has the flexibility to provide an entry point for students other than through a formal exam route so that they have broader access to a fast-developing job market. It has the potential to educate individuals so they can respond to a rapidly changing global reality (Tromp, 2018 p. 162). In 2016, Save the Children (SC) commenced implementation of a three-year pilot accelerated education (AE) project in Sierra Leone with the aim of drawing out-of-school students into education. Community involvement and ownership is a cornerstone of the project, which SC

hopes (subject to any necessary modification) can be replicated to support children in similar circumstances elsewhere. CBE demonstrates the potential to improve standards and outcomes for students who do not conform to conventional academic profiles. It can provide a flexible learning environment that supports learner-centred and life skills methodologies (Illich, 1970; Freire, 1970). I propose that this approach has an important role to play in creating job-related vocational options for students.

Conditional Cash Transfers (CCTs) that allocate funding to support children's education another tool that provides educational support for poor families are also important to consider. These types of interventions were pioneered in Brazil in the mid 1990s in the Bolsa Escola Programme (PBE), and they have been tested as a method of protecting extremely poor families from shock and avoiding generational repetition of poverty. The original scheme had three principal goals: a short-term increase in standards of family living, a reduction in levels of child labour and a rise in retention rates that would lead to a reduction in future poverty (Bonal, Tarabini & Rambla, 2012, p.4). Results so far suggest that CCTs provide basic social protection and they are successful in increasing school access (usually linked with provision of school meals), there is less clear evidence of success in other areas such as monitoring of and effective response to drop-out rates. But questions have still to be answered regarding learning, quality of instruction, repetition, promotion and general school improvement (Bonal, Tarabini & Rambla, 2012, p.3). Indications are that further research is required concerning aspects of the structure and delivery of CCTs.

Nonetheless, I assert that when context is embedded as a central pillar in the restructuring of education and initiative design is structured to align with population context it will result in a marked improvement in outcomes. And, as such, I propose that there should be thorough investigation of the potential of a system of CCTs that is dependent on school attendance and linked to provision of school meals in Sierra Leone, which I suggest would incentivise the poorest families to educate their children. Along these lines, Illich recommended the distribution of learning vouchers to be given by the state, which people could then spend on their preferred type of education or training (Illich, 1970). Teenage students would then be able to pursue vocational training courses tied into such a scheme, but such interventions would be heavily dependent on implementation of rigorous monitoring systems. In Chapter Six, I discuss this with reference to members of the 'Bench of Hope'; a young men's group whose demand for vocational training to upgrade skills that expand job opportunities would benefit from this system.

The expansion of technology and its wider availability that can be incorporated into education is a significant innovation that can support social and economic progression. In 2017, 11.4% (IWS, 2019) of the population in Sierra Leone had access to the internet. Sam (2015) proposes that improved technological communication can break the monopoly of influence controlled by political elites and alter the balance of power relations between citizens and national and local governments. Mobile phones and radio have an important role in connecting individuals to a wider audience, thus strengthening the voice of the marginalised: technology facilitates communication and can bypass bureaucratic structures and enable users to demand immediate responses from those otherwise not generally available to the public. Increased use of mobile phones can also inspire inclusive communication and potentially reduce marginalisation of young people. It can reach as far as opening possibilities for generating participatory democracy across the margins of society (Sam, 2015).

Mobile internet connectivity is emerging as an important tool in learning support and as a potential way to connect users in remote districts and increase women and girls' inclusion, but uptake of mobile internet connectivity is limited due to poor infrastructure, technological challenges and human capability. Internet facilities such as web browsing, emails, e-commerce, job searching and e-governance are not fully appreciated mainly due to illiteracy and low ICT skills, and cost is an additional deterrent for many. In the new quality education policy launched in August 2018 (see Sherriff, 2019) the GoSL declared its intention to prioritise funding for technology. Development of the availability, knowledge, range and use of technology will prove instrumental in the advancement of the country and its population.

The GoSL National Education Programme (NEP) document set out the 2013-2018 education strategy, which was fully aligned with PRSP3 and the Agenda for Prosperity (A4P). The task of the NEP was to support students in gaining critical skills and knowledge that would improve livelihood options and benefit families and the nation and equip them to become global citizens (NEP, n.d., p. 14). The Education Sector Plan (ESP) set out how the government intended to address a wide range of issues. These included poor examination performance, the failure of teachers and lecturers to adhere to and deliver the syllabus, the requirement for teacher training that would ensure teachers had the requisite qualifications, the need to develop competence-oriented teaching and learning and to address the issue of institutions operating without Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) approval. The GoSL allocated an estimated 3.5% of GDP to education in 2011, which was increased in 2014 to 20% of the national budget (IBIS, 2014).

The GoSL failed to implement comprehensive coverage of the UPE as part of the NEP in compliance with legislation. But I am aware that it is essential to contextualise UPE, as with each element of development policy and practice relating to Sierra Leone, and to recognise the enormity of challenges faced by both teachers and students. Hidden costs attached to free primary education, such as provision of uniforms, materials and food, and the requirement that children work to make a financial contribution to the family are strong disincentives to the extreme poor to educate their children (GCR, 2010). Several participants employed in the education sector confirmed direct links between family poverty and low value attached to education. Another common problem was that newly qualified teachers waited for months, sometimes even years, to be registered while qualified teachers were paid their salaries months in arrears. Unqualified teaching staff also depended on a stipend provided by families who could afford it. In summary, government plans for rapid reconstruction of the educational system in Sierra Leone are severely hindered by a lack of resources and structures that are necessary for implementing reforms in curricula and pedagogy that could prove a catalyst to women's empowerment. Denov & Maclure (2009) in their critique of the rapid education expansion programme highlighted the continuation of a non-transformative British-based system that is unable to eliminate gender inequalities. So, while the GoSL declared its support for women's empowerment, in practice it failed to implement the universal education programme (UEP), which is a necessary component in bringing about change in the existing, restrictive mindset that actively impedes progress towards gender equality (Stromquist, 2002).

4.7 'Quality' Education & the SDGs: The Challenge for Sierra Leone

National governments and the international community need to ensure quality education for all. This includes smart, innovative measures to reach young learners, as well as relevant education and training required to address common social, environmental and economic challenges across the world. Equal educational opportunity for girls and women is also critical in achieving gender equality, reducing child mortality, delaying marriage and generating female leaders.

(UNESCO, 2017)

Along with many other countries, Sierra Leone failed to achieve the 2000-2015 MDGs relating to women and education²¹. Nonetheless, the GoSL has committed to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2016-2035, set within a development framework designed to meet the challenges presented by widening inequalities, global economic crises, conflict and climate

²¹ MDG2: achieve universal primary education, MDG3: promote gender equality and empower women, MDG5: improve maternal health.

change. The SDGs position education at the heart of the agenda linking it directly to a reduction in inequality and an improvement in social well-being that moves towards overall sustainability (UNSDGs, n.d.). In 2016 the GoSL linked the SDGs to its National Plan, integrating the Goals into the budget. They were aligned with the A4P, which was itself directly tied to the PRSP, suggesting that there is little scope for an education programme that is anything other than ‘off the shelf’. The structure, design and delivery of education curricula is governed by conditionalities attached to loan criteria of PRSPs that are adopted into national development plans, which means they have to comply with the demands of both domestic stakeholders and external development partners such as the World Bank and the IMF. Education, as well as other areas of development programming that include health and social welfare, clashes with a contextual approach that features initiatives constructed with involvement of the community.

The drive to achieve UPE (as set out in MDG3) continues and is presented in SDG 4 as the goal of ensuring “inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” (SDGs Knowledge Platform). Thus, women and girls have an entitlement to access education, which is fully endorsed by the GoSL, but it is not provided. Debate is ongoing regarding education programming that is capable of advancing the socio-economic positioning of women and girls. Moreover, curricula has to respond to recent events, such as the 2014 EVD outbreak, that have led to an increase in sexual exploitation, violence against women and girls, teenage pregnancy, early marriage and transactional sex, as confirmed in research carried out by Plan International, Save the Children and World Vision International in 2015, and detailed in the *Children’s Ebola Recovery Assessment Report* (Finnegan & Risso-Gill, 2015). The degree to which the 2017 mudslide also added to trauma already suffered by local families requires further research and also needs to be acknowledged in the curriculum.

Though, the NEP acknowledged principal weaknesses in the sector and set goals for 2013-2018, the World Bank in its 2013 report found Sierra Leone was without a stated vision or strategic plan for its tertiary education. Kpapa and Klemm (2005, cited by Denov & Maclure, 2009, p. 39) stated that education in the country suffered from a “lack of consistency and overall national direction” that suggested the system that was in “a shambles”. In addition to these damning comments on the general state of the sector at a national level, far more specific and more shocking accounts have emerged telling of the abuse of school girls and ‘sex for grades’, claiming teachers are the cause of teenage pregnancies and that corruption is rife in the

sector.²² The GCR condemned scandalous practices within the teaching profession, noting that the “unethical behaviour of some teachers was identified as the primary cause of teenage pregnancy” (GCR, 2010, p. 81). In 2015, the Minister of Education stated that the country’s education sector was plagued by pervasive corruption, the elimination of which should be a civic responsibility. He reported that school authorities demanded payments for school fees they were not entitled to and illegal payments were made for admissions, assignments, tests, late fees, the collection of report cards and exam results. There was also examination malpractice and school materials were sold on the black market (AYV, 2015). This highlights the scale of dysfunction in the sector that effectively blocks delivery of ‘quality’ universal education and casts doubt on the capability of the sector to support women and girls meaningfully.

In its conclusion, the GCR (2010, p. 117) references the Education Act (2004, p. 16), which states categorically that responsibility for implementation of education programmes lies with the Minister of Education and the Department of Education who have wide legal powers to provide and deliver education. Recommendations made by the newly appointed Minister of Primary and Secondary Education in 2018 (after the fieldwork in this study had ended) confirmed that major problems flagged up in the Gbamanja report (2010) on the education sector remained unresolved. Given the evidence presented in this chapter, the GoSL’s integrity and its commitment to the successful delivery of girls’ education programmes and improvement in livelihood opportunities is doubtful. In a sector that has reached such a deplorable state of malfunction the task of reconstruction so that it can deliver ‘quality education’ is a monumental challenge.

4.8 Conclusion

While I am critical of the GoSL, particularly its lack of rigour and transparency and the absence of tangible and constructive input into the education sector, I acknowledge the immense challenges that it faces as well as the moves being made in a bid to overcome them. A three-year accelerated education programme (AE) running from 2016-2019, financed by Save the Children’s UK Strategic Breakthrough Investment Fund (Boisvert, 2017), was piloted in six districts in Pujehun (Southern Sierra Leone), catering mainly for out-of-school children and

²²Concern Worldwide conducted a survey of 645 girls and 667 boys randomly selected pupils from 123 primary, junior secondary and senior secondary schools across 7 districts. 42% of girls reported genital touching and 18% of girls reported having been raped, usually pressured by teachers who (if they acquiesced) would raise their grades. Most crimes go unreported (Concern Worldwide, 2010, pp. 2-5).

those who had not completed primary school. The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST), in working towards goals set out in the AfP, introduced new lesson plans in language, arts and maths across all primary and JSS school grades, along with teacher training to support delivery of the national curriculum and took responsibility for monitoring pupil and teacher attendance (GoSL, 2017). UNICEF (2017) pledged to monitor the condition of WASH facilities, and in May 2018 newly-elected President Maada Bio made a pledge to build new classroom blocks in urban areas, eliminate the two shift system within a few years, provide affordable school bus systems and work with the World Food Organisation (WFO) and other agencies expansion of feeding programmes (Their World, 2018). In August the same year, President Maada Bio launched the Free Quality School Education Initiative to be phased in over five years with support from donor partners including UK Aid, the World Bank, Irish Aid, the World Food Programme and UNICEF (Thomas, 2018). These initiatives are commendable, but they must be matched by strong government commitment to comprehensive implementation.

Despite pledges that have been made and changes that have been implemented, I remain alert to the fact that the education sector tolerates predatory, aggressive and threatening sexual behaviour towards female students. The safety of women and girls is threatened and does not provide the support and security they should be able to rely upon. In a community meeting during my last field visit to Kaningo, one man made an urgent request for lighting and a permanent police office to be based in Kaningo to reduce incidences of rape and assault of young girls and women in the locality. As evidenced by material presented in this chapter, the education sector is dysfunctional. The first step towards addressing the problems prior to raising standards is to begin a public debate, and to universally condemn and ultimately eradicated the issues that I have discussed. Misappropriation of funding allocated to education must cease, and there needs to be a commitment to the entire restructuring of the sector. This is necessary so that through increased capacity and training high-quality education can be delivered, and in the process, contempt for women and girls can be eradicated. If successful, this can lead to a shift in culture that reflects an increased respect for women and girls and that actively works to upgrade their socio-economic status in society.

The curriculum requires to promote girls' fundamental rights: girls should be educated and trained to a standard where they can earn a living; girls must be taught they have autonomy over their bodies; girls have the right to be independent; girls must be free to make choices; this directive is in line with Sen's capability approach adopted by the UN.

(GoSL, 2013, p. 134)

Advancement in the sector is reliant on political and economic stability and innovation backed by significant financial commitment. This will fuel a steep rise in professional standards that can be converted into revised educational programming and practice designed to raise overall standards. Before presenting the views of various stakeholders such as policy makers, government officials in extracts from interviews in the next chapter, I conclude here with a quotation that summarises the importance of aiming to achieve 100% literacy:

Literacy is a bridge from misery to hope. It is a tool for daily life in modern society. It is a bulwark against poverty, and a building block of development, an essential complement to investments in roads, dams, clinics and factories. Literacy is a platform for democratization, and a vehicle for the promotion of cultural and national identity. Especially for girls and women, it is an agent of family health and nutrition. For everyone, everywhere, literacy is, along with education in general, a basic human right.... Literacy is, finally, the road to human progress and the means through which every man, woman and child can realize his or her full potential.

(Kofi Annan, 2003)

5. VIEWS OFFERING DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

When poor is defined as lacking a number of things necessary to life, the question could be asked: What is necessary and for whom? And who is qualified to define all that?

(Rahnema, 2010, p. 175)

5.1 Introduction

Based on data gathered in semi-structured interviews with government officials, INGOs, NGOs, women's networks and advocacy groups, this chapter expands upon my critique of the development process and how it affects women and girls in Sierra Leone. Conversations revealed contradictions in the ways problems were viewed by different agents and highlighted certain recurring themes: the impact of patriarchy, culture and tradition as barriers that blocked women's and girls' access to healthcare, education and subsequent employment opportunities; and corruption embedded in the bureaucratic structure that actively obstructed the flow of aid into infrastructure and community projects. Interviews with community-based women's organisations and networks exposed levels of innovation and determination employed by women that were untapped by government or INGOs.

I present data from twenty-one interviews, divided into three participant categories: A, B and C. Group A includes providers and funders such as representatives from UN agencies and INGOs. Participants in this group were selected because their roles entail responsibility for some aspect of delivery of national programmes designed specifically to benefit women. They give detail regarding their designated roles and describe the programmes and discuss issues that obstruct progress towards women's equality. Group B includes state and national level administrators, such as representatives from government ministries and bureaucratic administrators. These interviews expose disparities between publicly stated government rhetoric that declares a commitment to delivering health and education initiatives (specifically those targeting women) and the reality, which is that national development programmes do not reach the intended beneficiaries. Finally, Group C participants are from national women's advocacy groups, national women's networks and women's associations who engage with women as citizens. They raise awareness among local populations of what women are entitled to, involve them in decision-making processes, and in doing so work collectively towards improving women's socio-economic positioning.

Group A. Interviews 1-5: Providers, UN Agencies and INGOs

1. Rule of Law Monitoring Officer (UNDP)
2. Senior Official, Monitoring and Evaluation, Gender Projects (Oxfam)
3. Senior Manager, Education (BRAC)
4. Education Officer (Action Aid)
5. UNICEF funded Community Team Leader.

Group B. Interviews 6-12: State-level Senior Officials

6. Regional Coordinator (Western Area FSU)
7. Coordinator (Women in Agriculture Nutrition Extension)
8. Senior Official (Gender and Advocacy Directorate)
9. Senior Government Official (MSWGCA)
10. Programme Officer (MSWGCA)
11. Senior Statistician (MEST)
12. Senior Statistician (Sierra Leone Office of National Statistics)

Group C. Interviews 13-21: Women's Advocacy Groups & Women's Networks and Associations

13. Founding Member (50/50)
14. Senior Official and Gender Specialist (50/50)
15. Founding Member (FAWE)
16. Community Action for Development Programmes and Services (CADEPS)
17. Gbanti Kamaranka (rural) Bombali District Women's Network (BDWN)
18. Tawopaneh Women's Community Network
19. Cooked Rice Seller's Association (Female Member)
20. One Word Women's Association
21. Lumley Market Women's Association (Board Member)

Results of interviews with Groups A, B and C expose a complex picture of government rhetoric and give insight into reasons for weak development outcomes. Section 1 identifies important themes highlighted in the interviews, Section 2 summarises key findings from each of the three groups of interviews (A, B and C) that reference aspects of women's and girls' socio-economic positioning, and Section 3 presents conclusions concerning education and healthcare input by government and relevant ministries.

5.2 Group A. Interviews 1-5: Providers, UN Agencies and INGOs

I conducted interviews with INGO senior officials and programme officers in central Freetown offices accompanied by a student researcher. Discussions provided important insights into the workings of the agencies and the efficacy of policy implementation. Conversations with interviewees confirmed a lack of visibility and action taken by government. For example, according to a BRAC senior official the national office in Freetown received direct funding from its parent organisation in Bangladesh, thereby bypassing the GoSL, as a method of budget and spending control. The official implied that it reduced opportunistic corruption in the form of misappropriation of funding by government officials. In Interview A1, the senior government official responsible for overseeing the delivery of the Improving Access to Justice Project in Sierra Leone outlines some of the challenges she faces in delivering an initiative designed to improve support for women and reduce rates of Gender Based Violence (GBV). The interview was conducted with the official in her office which I visited along with my research assistant in 2013. According to the interviewee, the project was reliant on funding and input provided by the UNDP, but she was not provided with sufficient resources or supported effectively to set up staff training to raise capacity levels that would ensure successful implementation of the programme. The department, I was told, was struggling to deliver the GoSL directive. The interviewee described the Access to Justice structure in Sierra Leone as follows:

UNDP coordinates policies and activities across the justice sector. Since 2008 there has been a programme to improve access to justice; now the focus is on reducing sexual and gender-based violence and improving justice service delivery in communities. The Sexual Offence Bill seeks to clarify issues and engage the MSWGCA and the National Commission of Sexual Offences [NCSO]. Progress is slow, the procedure is complicated, there are problems with enactment of the law, more cases are reported now but there's a lot of obstruction. Victims and their families are compromised; they accept money from the perpetrators. By the time a case proceeds to court interest is lost and it's not followed up. If someone is actually convicted, they do receive a heavy sentence.

Legal procedures:

A handbook is available on commencing prosecution and starting legal action. SBV [sexual based violence] and GBV have to be considered related to the issue of property; widows lose their rights to property which is then grabbed by family members. This is a new area supported by UNDP in addition to legal aid and training in gender laws and follow-up of cases after prosecution. Seminars are conducted in law schools on GBV, lawyers and magistrates are aware of the problems. There is no penal code: it all hinges on traditional beliefs, laws are pretty ancient and have to be updated regarding crimes against women and children. Police prosecution FSU [family support units] units [sic] have little capacity to prosecute.

[...]

UNDP supports the police and strives to improve investigation methods with use of a management guide, but problems remain with systems of investigation. Capacity-building is required to improve the structure. We need formal courts in the provinces to promote the rule of law and to fight impunity. Research needs to be carried out to find out how implementation can be improved. UNDP provides support for mobile courts, one in the northern district, one in eastern and one in the southern district. The circuit covers several districts once or twice monthly. UNDP is facilitating regional capacity-training linking with CBOs. Last year Saturday courts (two courts in Freetown and one in the north) were introduced with hearings for crimes against women and girls to clear the backlog.

SBV:

This year there is special focus on achieving justice faster in the area of sexual-based violence [SBV]. Violence against women is prevalent. Women are beaten, sometimes thrown out of the home, deprived of support. We help with awareness-raising, victim support, medical support, transport to hospital. There are safe houses for women who need to be given shelter. The International Rescue Committee and Rainbow Homes, both provide victim support. Sexual violence against children is prevalent despite stigma against the crime, it's particularly bad in the provinces.

Land Rights:

It is difficult to change traditional leaders' attitude towards women and their access to land and property. In Freetown land and property is owned by the individual; in rural areas ownership is held by communities and the families. There has been a land reform process in operation since 2007 but customary law overrules legislation on equal rights.

(Researcher interview, A1, 2013)

The official outlined a number of actions that have the potential to improve capacity, strengthen law and order, and improve the justice system and also confirmed the prevalence of GBV, asserting that support was badly needed for women who were affected by it. The requirement for capacity-building was flagged up as a primary concern. Along with other interviewees, this participant volunteered that issues arose from the constraints imposed by the patriarchal system (as discussed in Chapter Three) that were blocking women and girls' progress.

Interview A2 - Senior Official, Monitoring and Evaluation, Gender Projects (Oxfam):

In this interview, the head of Oxfam's monitoring and evaluation of gender projects told me that she believed rigorous project monitoring and project feedback was key to informing and updating herself and her staff on pressing issues in the community. Her work schedule required her to strike a balance between time she spent carrying out her office duties and time she devoted to field work. In this way she and her team were knowledgeable regarding community

issues and had constant updates. She stressed that she and her team's interaction in the community plus the level of local knowledge they had accumulated meant they had a clear understanding of women's socio-economic positioning and the nature of the input required to improve their status. She demonstrated empathy with and understanding of local women and applied direct and innovative approaches to improving the status of women, and she also highlighted some of the challenges her organisation faced in conducting fieldwork in support of women. Oxfam's practice of conducting confidence-building exercises as a first step towards women's full engagement in community matters (as they had done since the end of the conflict) was in stark contrast to the top-down, detached approach of several government officials.

Self Help Groups (SHGs):

Women's groups depend on funding and training good local representatives. SHGs need support to reach a basic level of organisational capacity, they need to grow and create dynamic, purposeful links to projects. There are specific initiatives, but gaps exist. Women's Forum is one active umbrella organisation which has a representative linking to the national level. The Soweis, heads of the Bundu, have a lot of power over women which isn't always positive.

The Agenda for Change [PRSP3]²³ leaves agriculture [already noted as a major percentage of GDP and of employment for women] youth and women still struggling. Women farmers need support to earn more than just for survival, their work needs to develop into a business. Women need political empowerment; they lack capacity. DFID runs programmes to support women aspirants at a local level. We have supported training of councillors, sensitisation, confidence-building, capacity-building. It's challenging; rarely is a woman elected as paramount chief. We realise it's important to engage men, they benefit from capacity-building also.

Watchdogs - 'a fresh approach':

One project has embarked on a complicated process dependent on support from the paramount chief and commitment from the local authority. Women are trained in property rights then some become 'facilitator-watchdogs'. They help manage the project and at the same time they monitor and report on beatings commonly inflicted as a sign of devotion and love and used to renew vows. There has to be collaboration to protect women - to give them strength to raise issues. By-laws are created in communities within the villages. Training is carried out, sensitisation, engagement with chiefs, then by-laws are agreed. After this even if you are a victim of beating and do not report it others will. Social pressures come into play. Religious leaders are supportive of this initiative.

²³ GoSL first full Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), 2005 – 2007, Agenda for Change (A4C) PRSP 11 2008 – 2012, Agenda for Prosperity (A4P), PRSP 111, 2013 – 2018, The New Direction, (ND), PRSP 4, 2019 – 2024 (World Bank, n.d.).

GBV:

There is a prevalence of violence against women. It's common for a husband to beat his wife as re-affirmation of the marriage, so is physical violence perpetrated against women. The women's lack of confidence compounds the situation. We run confidence-building training sessions, we provide sensitisation on rights and violence against children. We promote the three Gender Acts with paralegal support. We work at ward level, district level and with paralegals. There is a lack of financial support for these programmes. Elsewhere there is a national network of lawyers. We work with national NGOs, CBOs, and community networks. We have sub-offices in the provinces. We conduct monitoring review meetings with key stakeholders, beneficiaries and hold regular programme reviews where we look closely at the impact of the intervention. We conduct M & E programmes.

[...]

We focus on political empowerment, women's property rights, enhancing livelihood and resilience, this is a short-term project.

[...]

We work with the EU on input and networks for farming and schools, water, sanitation and governance, building accountability to stakeholders.

(Researcher interview, A2, 2013)

This interviewee was responsible for delivery and overall monitoring of projects in Kailahun district in Eastern Sierra Leone designed to educate women through confidence-building initiatives; an approach which I was told was successful in supporting women to begin the process of restructuring their lives. Social issues were highlighted in this interview, in particular the power of chiefs, which the participant stated should be reduced as an essential first step towards women's equality. She discussed the negative power and control that the traditional structure exerted over women and she gave details of the actions she believes need to be taken to create change. She discusses GBV and the ways in which it was interwoven with traditional beliefs and superstitions as identified in several interviews in this section. She confirmed that aggression towards women was accepted within the patriarchal structure and advocated education as the prime agent of change.

In the second part of the interview the participant commented on the need to support women at community level through SHGs, she described a project designed to reduce GBV, a serious issue that she believed was exacerbated by women's lack of confidence. GBV, she suggested, was also a manifestation of a method by which men who were in poverty and unable to provide for the family or who felt disenfranchised politically and socially could demonstrate power in one sphere of their lives. As statistics show (see Chapter Three), approximately two thirds of

women believed physical abuse ('wife-beating') to be acceptable compared to approximately one third of men. The insights detailed above provide reveal some of the ways in which gender relations operate to marginalise women and render them vulnerable to violence.

Interview A3 - Senior Manager, Education (BRAC):

The BRAC Senior Official demonstrated an awareness of the needs of communities, many of which were isolated and functioning at basic survival levels. The pressures that they were under to earn money for survival and to fulfil their most basic needs meant education was not always considered a priority. He described the organisation's interaction with local groups and preparatory research carried out prior to interventions. He gave some detail regarding the lack of capacity across the sector and highlighted the government's inability to set up a comprehensive structure to train teachers and make sure they receive appropriate remuneration. I interpreted the situation as further evidence of the GoSL's failure to implement national initiatives, thus defaulting on its responsibility to the population (in Chapter Six I give more detail of the fieldwork carried out by BRAC community workers and the methods used to identify the main issues affecting adolescent girls). The interviewee described the national context and the position and role of BRAC in the country as follows:

The INGO came into Sierra Leone in 2008 but I still feel we have to prove the significance of our presence in Sierra Leone. DFID funds us directly, choosing to bypass government to obviate wastage. We carry out preparatory fieldwork to identify needs and priorities of adolescent girls, listening, observing, interacting in the community. We employ young Sierra Leonean national community workers to conduct fieldwork.

[...]

For the majority of families, work comes first: parents need the money. Street trading is the biggest challenge we face in trying to get kids into school. More than 10% of children 8-12 make a significant contribution to the national income. How do we convince parents of the value of education? We have monthly parents' meetings where we try to involve the parents and find constructive ways forward. We now have a 10am start and finish by 12.30pm, we have a food budget funded by the WFP and DFID and we talk about the importance of girls' education.

[...]

We need student materials to help to motivate people, we don't have books in Sierra Leone. Many teachers have only had twelve days training, some have a further nine days, perhaps a two-day refresher course, they may only have been working for one year; many are unpaid. In the schools BRAC has set up we give teachers two days training per week; we monitor them and aim to bring them up to national grades. We need to work on incorporating teachers with 3-4 years' experience into the school, otherwise what future do they have? We receive no funding from the government for

teacher training; we're reliant on expert input from Bangladesh where BRAC originated from, where we know there is a functioning and proven model and effective monitoring systems. We follow the national curriculum.

(Researcher interview, A3, 2013)

The BRAC senior education officer and his staff appeared to be dedicated to delivering projects in the community but were not aided in the efforts by adequate government backing. It was apparent that BRAC would have preferred to establish a good relationship with the GoSL but, as it was, they found communication and interaction with government departments difficult.

Interview A4 - Education Officer (Action Aid):

The remit of Action Aid in Sierra Leone is to support the provision of educational facilities. My meeting with a senior official indicated that this INGO had a light but broad involvement across the education sector rather than focusing on delivering one main initiative. The interviewee described the role of Action Aid in the national context as follows:

The role of the INGO is to provide quality education for boys and girls and to complement the efforts of the government. We link with the UK to provide a sponsorship scheme which is of direct benefit to the child. We actively promote girls' education. We provide teaching and learning materials. We provide distance learning for unqualified, untrained and unpaid community teachers; during the long holiday the teachers attend classes given by lecturers from a university in the north of England. We pay their tuition fees and a small stipend. Teachers' salaries are paid by the IMF, but there is a ceiling so even when teachers qualify and are put on the pay roll it doesn't ensure all receive payment. We ask newly qualified teachers to sign a letter of commitment to stay in the community for two, three or four years. We ask them to take responsibility: those who are untrained usually stay in the community but when teachers are qualified that's when they move away, they don't stay. The government is funding recruitment of 4,000 trained teachers who will be paid, but is not involved in costs of training teachers, other partners contribute.

[...]

We encourage our best-performing girls; they have an advantage once they have qualifications. We run violence against girls [VAG] clubs, mothers' clubs where children are taught how to manage children's affairs. We have a revolving fund which provides support for girls with a child at home. We do have high drop-out rates for girls. We link with local partners and with 'Education for All', a Ministry of Education initiative. We work with UNFPA on researching ways to reduce high rates of teenage pregnancy and lessening the impact this has on girls' education. We work with UNICEF to reduce numbers of out-of-school children and we comply with a code of conduct which doesn't tolerate corporal punishment.

(Researcher interview, A4, 2013)

The education services provided by Action Aid (see Action Aid, 2019), particularly facilities for girls, made for impressive reading. The education officer quoted from some of Action Aid's policy documents and described initiatives and situations which contradicted information I collected in conversations with community women. The descriptions also did not coincide with my experience - which told a very different story - in the field in both urban and rural districts (see interviews in Chapters Five and Six). Oral accounts presented a perspective focussed on survival that exposed the reality of women's lives, and the basic systems they relied on for the survival of themselves and their families.

This interview indicated that the priority was to earn a basic income that could sustain the family. It highlighted that it was common for children as young as eight years old to engage in petty trading (selling cheap household items) on the street to provide essentials for the family. In the interviews presented in the next chapter, conducted during field visits to Kaningo, I learned of families who sent school-age girls out to earn money from prostitution in order to put food on the table.

Interview A5 - Community Team Leader

The next interviewee provides an account of his experience as a community team leader who was responsible for implementing a Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Support (WASH) Programme in villages in Northern Sierra Leone. He was employed by a national NGO funded by UNICEF.

He stated:

I worked closely with the NGO on several occasions both in Freetown and in the provinces. On completion of a Community Led Total Sanitation [CLTS] programme, the next planned project was a water, sanitation and hygiene programme [WASH] in Bombali district which failed to be completed due to the reported embezzlement of funds.

He had worked with the communities over a period of several years developing a strong rapport with the villagers. He described the pressures he found himself under and the emotional conflict he experienced in being unable to fulfil community programmes:

The NGO has not been given any projects this year. The situation is really serious. Senior management in the organisation are not functioning properly. Seventy per cent of project monies are directed to individuals' personal use leaving us unable to carry out interventions; as you know our work supports communities in rural districts living at basic survival level.

[...]

We have not been paid for six months. Our national social security insurance trust [NASSIT] say money has been embezzled; my colleagues can verify this. We have projects funded by a large global donor that we can't complete as all available resources are used up. We have a board of directors which even senior staff in the organisation don't know, to the best of my knowledge the group has never held a board meeting. The problem lies with senior management and access to the organisation's bank account. Everyone working in the field wants to continue with the projects and complete them on time, but all the resources are diverted for personal use at the expense of the projects, the beneficiaries and the staff.

[...]

We plan to bring the issues to the attention of top management, also NASSIT and the benefits office before taking the matter to the authorities.

(Researcher interview, A5, 2013)

When liaising with the NGO's Freetown office, I was initially welcomed by the director who agreed to support my field trip. He offered that I could travel in one of the organisation's vehicles that was scheduled to visit the district and that I should be accompanied by a staff community worker who would facilitate access to communities. But unfortunately, the relationship became strained as my research advanced, the director was less available and reluctant to liaise with staff on my behalf and provide support through the Makeni branch office. This made the whole exercise far more difficult to organise at short notice and increased the cost considerably as I had to hire a vehicle, employ a driver, buy fuel and subsidise a research assistant.

In its 2013 report *DFID's work through UNICEF*, ICAI²⁴ (2013) criticised UNICEF's activities in Sierra Leone raising serious concerns regarding the implementation of its in-country operation. ICAI was also heavily critical of DFID and its over-reliance on UN agencies such as UNICEF, which it found did not have the capacity to deliver national programmes in Sierra Leone. The community team leader's experience confirmed a lack of monitoring and accountability. From my own experience of the fieldtrip, I learned not to rely on support from the director and staff.

Summary of Group A: Interviews 1-5

The interviews in Group A reveal an absence of any consistent approach or coordinated response to fulfilling the needs of marginalised women. Interviewee A5 exposed the misappropriation of funding and non-implementation of a project that was intended to provide

²⁴ The Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI) is an independent body responsible for scrutinising aid and cost-effectiveness of programmes reports directly to the UK government. ICAI is funded through voluntary grant contributions from governments, charitable foundations, corporate and private sources.

basic facilities to extremely disadvantaged populations. Organisations that succeeded in directing their resources correctly did so by first seeking a detailed contextual understanding of women's lives. These operations worked more remotely from the GoSL which had little input. UN agencies and INGOs that were more closely involved with the GoSL were often obstructed in their endeavours by dysfunctional government departments that lacked the necessary capacity, training and ability to support delivery of programmes.

During field trips to the provinces I became acutely aware of the fragile existence of communities. I was aware that monies diverted from projects as described in Interview A5 threatened the very survival of the designated 'beneficiaries' of the UNICEF-funded WASH support programme. People were severely affected by the collapse of the project. I learned that women rose before daylight, then immediately went to work all day in the fields cultivating their communal agricultural land, which women referred to as 'gardens'. Women cooked one daily meal in the late afternoon for the family to eat in the evening after work. The meal would have more or fewer ingredients according to available and affordable supplies on any given day. If there was no money, then families could not purchase supplies which meant no one would eat at all that day. In several communities, morale was evidently so low in the midst of grinding poverty that there was a palpable feeling of powerlessness and complete resignation. It is in this context that funds allocated to the project were being siphoned off by senior staff in the NGO.

5.3 Group B. Interviews 6-12: State-level Senior Officials

Interviews B6-B12 were conducted with senior government officials in departments involved in the implementation of national health, education and welfare initiatives and responsible for monitoring the impact of programmes designed to improve women's socio-economic position. The participants bore varying degrees of responsibility for achieving outcomes that would improve the welfare of women and girls. For these interviews, I first presented a letter of introduction, then scheduled and confirmed the interviews: each one took place in government offices in central Freetown. Conversations lasted for a minimum of one hour and a maximum of two hours, and, whenever possible, I scheduled follow-up meetings to verify information and collect new material. On several visits I was able to identify further prospective interviewees relevant to my research. Included in this section is a personal account (interview B10) volunteered by a bureaucrat. It details some of the pressures that women endure and that threaten their health and well-being.

Interview B 6 - Regional Coordinator (Western Area FSU):

In the first interview the regional coordinator of the Western area Family Support Unit gives a brief history of the foundation and development of the unit.

In 1999 the first Domestic Violence Unit was set up in response to a steep rise in rates of violent domestic incidents. In 2001 the FSU was established under the auspices of the Criminal Investigation Department. In 2004 it became a separate unit with an increase in the number of personnel, a database was set up and units were established in the provinces. Now there are fourteen FSUs in Freetown, Aberdeen and the Western area which are sponsored by the UNDP.

The regional coordinator, a senior government official whose mandate was the protection of vulnerable women and children, worked with women who had suffered SBV and domestic violence. She described her role and gave examples of sexual and physical violence and abuse that had inflicted severe and lasting mental and physical damage on women and girls. She detailed restrictive customary and traditional practices within patriarchal structures that control women and obstructed their advancement. The coordinator stressed that the FSU, supported by the UNDP, was in need of increased funding to alleviate pressure on overstretched services.

GBV:

Stigma attached to sexual abuse has reduced since the FSU was set up. Now there is more respect of human rights, more dignity, more sensitivity. UNICEF works with us. Officers are taught interview skills, to encourage people to relax in the environment. Cases used to be heard in an open court; now they're heard in chambers. We carry out sensitisation through radio and TV and we have a media unit which publicises incidents. Perpetrators are named, not the victims. The problem is that some violators end up back in the same environment. Abused and violated children are taken into a centre where they attend school and are integrated back into the community, but we need more support services; the budget allocated to the FSU is very small compared to other government agencies.

[...]

In the last two to three years incidences of sexual violence have reduced, now it's mostly physical abuse that takes place in the domestic environment. There are strong links between violence and poverty. It gives psychological higher status to the perpetrator. Male teachers abuse children; we have to teach men that violence is not acceptable. Someone in the security sector touched a child and was sent to court. It took a few months to relocate the child and during that time the father used to handcuff the boy and beat him, punishing him for his 'offence'. It needs education, sensitisation, the support of other NGOs; for some no amount of education seems to make any difference. Sentences for minor crimes are usually around two years, up to five years for sexual violence. Problems are worse in densely populated slums. Young girls are trafficked, taken ostensibly as domestic workers and nannies. It happens in the beach areas; girls hook up with a guy and are trafficked for prostitution.

Culture and tradition:

Culture and tradition are strong, many of the problems lie with traditional rulers. Families want their children to marry a chief because it gives them status. The chief is often a landowner - in mining communities he may lease land belonging to the community and benefit personally from the royalties! Land owned by 300 - 400 families may be grabbed and sold for nothing; US\$3 for one acre. These communities need support. Chiefs may have four wives or more, paramount chiefs also. One paramount chief is known to have 100 plus children. Some of these children end up on the streets uncared for. We work closely with the Ministry of Social Welfare and social workers to reduce stigma attached to divorce. The woman has to pay back the dowry. In 2007 one woman was asked to pay back Le 1,000,000 [2010 rate. \$300 approx.] Now the Gender Act states that assets should be shared, the woman should have a share of the property, she may be entitled to be given a room. In poorer homes this doesn't necessarily happen.

This interview provided some insight into women's weakened socio-economic position and the challenges the FSU faced in providing women with support. She highlighted the progress the FSU had made since its inception, and in the second part of the interview she gave examples of endemic corruption that acted as major impediments to development. She went as far as to spell out inherent risks she believed the practices posed to peace in Sierra Leone, which she referred to as "a fragile state." She described the majority of communities in the urban environment as uneducated and struggling to function at survival level, with most of the burden placed upon women whose lives were controlled by the traditional customs and practices upheld by the chief. It was in the vested interest of the chief to maintain traditional hierarchies as they preserved his powerful role in decision-making and his ability to accumulate wealth. Later in the interview the senior official also discussed how a lack of government commitment carried through to an absence of media engagement with women's rights and so supports a skewed political system that rewarded those perpetuating the "status quo" without seeking transformation. In the following statements, the interviewee addressed the issue of corruption:

The media is paid off, the radio defends government agents. The Vice-President is chairman of the police council, the Minister of Internal Affairs is on the police council. The inspector of police is appointed by the President, the police are semi-political. It's a myth that the police they are independent; they're controlled by the government. The Anti-Corruption Commissioner gets Le 48,000,000 per annum and the Electoral Commissioner's salary was recently raised from Le 10,000,000 to Le 30,000,000. The minimum wage in Sierra Leone is Le 150,000.

[...]

My salary is less than Le 580,000 [US\$157] per month. My husband earns around Le 405,152 [US\$110] per month. The system is corrupt, people depend on the status of their professional position, cars and houses et cetera, but salaries are so low it tempts

them to accept bribes, give kickbacks, they lose their integrity. Graduates end up in mining where they earn better money, or they join the police force. There is a high turnover; a brain drain. The quality of the police force is low, it's only necessary to have completed grade one [Junior Secondary School] JSS [approximately aged 12 years]. It's the same with the judiciary. This is a fragile state, if we want to demonstrate peacefully, we have to get clearance from the police, people may be arrested and charged. There are signs of unrest.

[...]

In Freetown we don't have food security, we don't have enough to eat and it's far worse in the provinces. People need food on the table. Seventy per cent of the population is illiterate, they see progress as roads being made through the town; they don't realise most roads are built to support the mining industry not to connect the highest areas of agricultural productivity. People live on hope mainly, although some good things do happen. NGOs are working in education, we have some graduates, roads are being built although it involves kickbacks.

(Researcher interview, B6, 2013)

She detailed inequalities that tempted those in positions of power to exploit the system to ensure their own security. In response to such extremes of social and economic wealth and poverty, and in spite of circumstances that infringed on people's basic human rights, she expressed cautious optimism that things would improve. The interview highlighted how little concern there was to secure women's empowerment. The participant held strong views on the reasons why problems were not resolved; however, when I asked her about what her role involved on a day-to-day basis and the time she spent in communities, she responded that she was office-based and seldom went out on field visits.

Interview B7 - Coordinator (Women in Agriculture Nutrition Extension):

Just over half of the population of Sierra Leone derives the bulk of their income from farming, and among them approximately 70% of women are employed in agriculture, providing 75% of the labour (FAO, 2018). The Women in Agriculture and Nutrition Extension is a government agency that functions as an independent unit operating across the entire country operating within a 'meagre budget'. On the day of the interview, I looked at a chart behind the coordinator's desk: it outlined rural women's daily activities which included washing (laundry), supporting their husbands, trading, pounding and grinding cassava and grains, wood gathering, cleaning, farming, office work, cooking, household care, literacy classes and clothing the family. The interviewee described men's views on women's groups and explained how women's extremely low status translated into the position they occupy in society. She went on to outline the role of the unit, and to indicate some of the principal challenges it faced.

Low Status of Women:

The unit addresses women farmers' issues. It subsidises women and builds their capacity. We implement strategies to ensure food security, we give training in enterprise skills and vegetable production, all on an extremely meagre budget. Most of these women are poor, illiterate, disadvantaged, pregnant and lactating. They do not have access to inputs. The men block this. It is the tradition. Husband is number one. There are slight signs of change, but men remain in front, while the woman does the work, the man may have access to training, but he won't share it with his wife. There's an ongoing struggle for supremacy, men in theory are the breadwinners and women are dependent on men for their daily survival. Men often see women's groups as a threat, but women are powerless, they're not involved in the decision-making process which takes place at the secret bush, women are excluded. There's a saying: "A hen does not crow!" The majority of women farmers don't have access to land, or to credit, they don't have the collateral. If the husband dies, the widow is usually forced to marry a relative; if she refuses, she will get nothing from the husband's estate.

Position of the Unit:

We need a national training centre with certificates, diplomas, Higher National Diplomas (HNDs), so that students can progress to university. We need to focus on processing, preservation, value-added, marketing, post-harvest links. Right now, we have to rely on responsible staff in organisations such as Action Aid working with us. They have a gender specialist who is aware of the needs of women farmers, pregnant women, the under-fives. They collaborate, they don't block initiatives and they encourage the women to grow protein crops.

[...]

The ministry is male-dominated, women are marginalized; since decentralisation the district office is in charge [...but...] there is no interest in the unit, it isn't gender-focused.[...] We have been working on a soya bean project to improve protein provision in the diet for at least the last five years. We put forward a proposal for a gender-based project and we're still waiting for a response.

Corruption within the System:

The system is rotten, there is huge corruption and there's no money to run the country, the government exists on lots of kickbacks. There is no transparency within the extractive industries. Mining agreements ensure that mining companies pay extremely low levels of tax. The minister presented his vision in the National Plan, but it doesn't mean anything, the government is not sincere. The first financial allocation from our agreed work-plan a few months ago is still to be paid, contractors have not received any money. The ministry doesn't have a grip on field staff.

[...]

The president is chancellor of all the universities, there is no independence. All sectors are politicised: 40,000 teachers, 8,000 police, 9,000 military. Political statements made by the president in support of women are purely statements.

Funding from UK-based charities doesn't go directly to beneficiaries, it passes through NGOs and large sums disappear into private pockets along the way on 'overheads' so the impact ends up being minimal in relation to resources. The 50/50 women's advocacy group is political, not social. Women's Forum focuses on advocacy, but nothing changes. Resources and implementation are poor and at district level they don't function. There is no incentive for graduates. My son was studying to become a doctor but has had to be content with qualifying as a pharmacist due to the costs of studying. Many students find themselves harassed. Universities don't send graduates to the extension.

(Researcher interview, B7, 2013)

It was evident that the interviewee considered the successful functioning of the department to be thwarted by what she referred to as corruption embedded in the system, and that this was exacerbated by the degree to which entrenched patriarchy blocked change. As in Interview B6, reference was made to the politicisation of government institutions that were expected to remain impartial and also to a lack of sincerity on the part of the government with regard to its commitment to the implementation of development programmes. During our conversation, the interviewee expressed her deep frustration with the system. She told me how desperate she was for provision of training and capacity-building for herself and for her staff. Inevitably in the post-conflict period, the ability to fulfil such requirements had been severely restricted.

The extensive post-conflict reconstruction that Sierra Leone required, meant it was not possible for all socio-economic issues to be resolved immediately, and the GoSL was forced to prioritise (Grindle, 2002, p.1-54). Government departments, heavily funded by international donors, charged with responsibility for delivering national initiatives struggled to deliver basic health, education and welfare despite dedicated budgets being legislated for. Funding allocated by the UN, DFID and INGOs failed to deliver services to those in need. The coordinator was office-based, she lacked access to resources and did not have a dedicated team trained to carry out the work. She was therefore unable to fulfil her role and carry out her assigned tasks to a professional standard. She claimed the GoSL was aware of the issues but did not take action, and that officials bypassed the responsibilities attached to their position, instead citing underfunding, weak capacity, cronyism and endemic corruption as causes. It became increasingly apparent in the interviews that follow that senior bureaucrats in key government ministries rejected any suggestion of investigating why corruption was so endemic. This may be because they had co-opted the Western term and did not connect 'corruption' with their own behaviour. They appeared to derive benefits and a certain degree of security from compliance with the prevailing social and economic structures, which they did not wish to lose. Therefore, they were averse to change, preferring to subscribe to and uphold the status quo.

Interview B8 - Senior Official (Gender and Advocacy Directorate):

In this interview the participant commented on the enormity of the challenges faced by government departments and the adverse effect that patriarchal control, culture and tradition exerts over women and girls. This senior official in the Gender Directorate linked to the MSWGCA was closely involved with development of the National Gender Strategy. She described the challenges she and colleagues in her department faced as follows:

The system is intimidating, there are delays. There is no court exclusively for women. When complaints are made of rape and other violations it's difficult to provide substantial evidence; there is so much corruption, destruction of police evidence and no forensic testing. The poor are not represented, they have no money, they don't receive counselling. Stigmatisation means the victim doesn't want people to know, she is likely to remain with the offender's family, mothers may keep silent, afraid that the husband will leave. People are so poor and lacking in confidence that they won't speak out. They have no confidence in the court set-up. They sit back and think, 'God will fight for me.' Women need to be trained to advocate and lobby government. Nothing is being done about GBV - minors are being raped by their fathers, by their siblings, by family members. It's rampant in the mining areas. Old men (60-70) think if they have sex with young girls or with virgins they will be protected from HIV/AIDS. We are hoping the Sexual Offences Act will improve the situation; we hope that GBV will be reduced through punishment and fines.

FGM: Cultural and Traditional Practices:

There is a certain amount of sensitisation regarding FGM through community radio. Gender specialists attached to State House work with the Soweis. The Child Rights Act provides guidelines that minors should not be initiated, it should only happen to girls of eighteen and over who have given their consent but the Soweis and Bundu women's societies are very strong. There are reports that they have consented to the age limit, but a girl's freedom is restricted in the community, and Soweis are extremely influential. It's their livelihood, their profession. They're paid to carry out the initiations, they don't have an alternative source of income and parents comply, providing provisions for the girls to go off to the bush for 3-4 weeks. The president makes a statement, the majority vote against the practice but there is no political will. No one wants to jeopardise votes. The government needs votes so it won't rock the boat. Soweis need to be trained in other ways of earning a living.

[...]

A social worker colleague initiated her daughter as a way of protecting her against becoming pregnant, but it didn't work. Educated families retain traditional practices and pass them on. I believe this practice has spiritual implications. The barriers need to be broken; it happens in the UK with African families as well. People are cajoled, they even go as far as to suggest it's a white man's idea. Krio communities say they take their children to the gynaecologist for health reasons, they say it will protect them from HIV/AIDS. Soweis are especially active in poor communities. There is an

oath of secrecy which means there is silence on the subject. It infringes on human rights, the right to say no; some girls go to the villages for holidays where they are forcibly cut. If you are not a member of the Bundu you have no say. You are not involved in decision-making, you are an outsider, a non-entity, a nobody.

(Researcher interview, B8, 2013)

Interviewee B8 highlights the power of patriarchy, culture and tradition that controls women and contributes to their low status and sets it within a political context that adds an extra dimension to comprehension of the lack of commitment to change. The interviewee described the poor as 'powerless' and 'without voice', defeated and acquiescing in their situation, and requiring enormous amounts of support. A number of issues arose from interviews with female senior officials, in particular questions regarding the role of educated elite women who advocated on behalf of the poor. It was important to question the extent to which, they could relate to the basic needs of the poor. As interviewee B8 illustrated with reference to the social worker, women could even go as far as actively perpetuating the practice traditional customs like FGM that exert control over women including their own daughters.

Interview B9 - Senior Government Official (MSWGCA):

I met with a senior official of the Ministry of Gender, Social Welfare and Children's Affairs (MGSWCA) who claimed to support disadvantaged women but explained that his department's responsibilities did not extend as far as implementation of projects at the community level. He stated that he occupied himself exclusively with policy, delegating the task of implementation to UNICEF. He said, "We have little direct involvement at community level." The focus of his department was instead on the provision of advocacy on gender issues. The interviewee made this and other oblique references, reiterating policy statements, throwing in abstract concepts without offering details of his relationship with UNICEF or the methods of programme implementation. It was apparent from the interview and the experiences of local women that they were not shaping or influencing government thinking. Parpart, Rai & Staudt (2002) argued that it is essential that women are well represented at policy level; their experiences should be at the forefront of officials' minds as they devise programmes. The result of such basic disconnections in the bureaucratic structure means that initiatives fail to percolate through the hierarchical structure, either not reaching or failing to benefit community women. Inconsistencies in such systems were revealed in interviews B9 and B10. Though in separate departments, the remits of the interviewees overlapped, and they shared some common responsibilities. The conversations highlighted the lack of communication between the government offices even within the same ministry.

The senior official described his interpretation of the role of the Ministry as follows:

The MGSWCA has little direct involvement at community level. We have neither the staff or resources to cover outreach to the community or to monitor effectiveness of policies. Our task is to put the National Strategic Plan into action, linking with UNICEF who work on behalf of women at community, district and national levels. The ministry provides an interface between donors and development partners. My department is responsible for providing advocacy on gender issues. The ministry builds a coalition on gender advocacy through coordinating, collaborating and networking and plays a part in monitoring procedures of these programmes. The ministry is notoriously underfunded and under-resourced which must be factored into any criticism.

(Researcher interview, B9, 2013)

During periods of fieldwork in Freetown I met with several other officials who commented that the MSWGCA, as its name might suggest, had an impossibly broad remit while also being grossly underfunded. This goes some way toward explaining, and possibly justifying, the narrowly defined policy statement given by the MSWGCA programme officer as summarised above. Government officials repeatedly blamed the lack of progress on underfunding, inadequate resources and lack of capacity. While this is no doubt true to some degree, it does not fully explain the failure of development programmes. Obfuscation of this kind draws attention away from major issues such as the 'diversion' of donor funds, the methods donors employ to bypass the GoSL to avoid such practices, and, I suspect, a lack of empathy by some government officials and members of the elite towards the poor. These issues are examined in more detail in Chapter Six.

Interview B10 - Programme Officer (MSWGCA):

In this interview the programme officer shared her direct experience of the negative impact cultural and traditional practices have had on women and girls and gave examples of the principal socio-economic factors that exacerbate the problems. She discussed the failure of government and policymakers, recognising that though they were often heavy on rhetoric they were light on commitment when it came to delivery of initiatives. As several interviews confirmed, senior bureaucrats blamed the system but did not seek to change it. They claimed to have a lack of resources and insufficient influence, and they appeared powerless to challenge and change the flawed development structure that failed to sustain the poor. Some senior officials in government ministries who held key government positions appeared not only to be completely ineffectual but also to actually be contributing to the waste of financial and human resources in the development sector.

Unprompted, the interviewee volunteered to recount the trauma that she suffered in going through forced FGM when she was a child. In the following first-hand account of forced initiation, the interviewee revisited deep trauma and distress decades after the event. This resonates with the theory of memoryscapes in which Leach (1994) theorised that memories left unprocessed lie dormant and can be resurrected in the future. It is possible that a further reason for lack of engagement between senior female officials and poor women is self-protection, not wanting to hear stories of trauma that may awaken deep scars. She told her story as follows:

I was raised as an English girl, but I was coerced, forced, traumatised. My father was sick and called to persuade me to undergo the initiation, so I did. I was in form 5 so I knew what was happening. I regret going to the bush, I was there when he died. I was shocked, traumatised, I didn't understand the gravity of what was happening. People sat on my chest, restrained me and cut me. I do not want this for my daughter or my son, I don't want him to be a member of the Poro society. It is devilish, barbaric, it has spiritual implications, it is the work of the devil. I am Christian, it directly hinges on deliverance, darkness. No one looked after me; my mother was old. She was a member of the Bundu, but it was solely my father's decision. I rarely go back to the village. I see the Sowe activity, I see girls and women who are not empowered. They even initiated a white researcher who went to the village. Once someone is initiated, they will not speak about it.

(Researcher interview, B10, 2013)

Interview B11 - Senior Statistician (MEST):

In this interview, the statistician from the MEST provided insights into the education sector, which was decimated by rebels during the civil war as a deliberate tactic to undermine the power structure. Post-war, the sector faced immense challenges including reconstruction of the education infrastructure, teacher training, and provision of books and learning materials, all within a tight timeframe and under pressure to implement the UPE programme. The two-shift system was still in operation mainly due to lack of infrastructure, accommodation for students, trained teachers, general facilities and materials. The morning shift was scheduled to start at 8.30am, but due to lateness of both teachers and pupils usually began a couple of hours late and finished at 12.30pm. Older groups joined afternoon classes, but many were tired when they reached school from the efforts of their morning work and domestic duties (GCR, 2010, p. 61). The situation was exacerbated by lack of motivation among teachers who could earn significant amounts giving private tuition while they were paid up three years in arrears (GCR, 2010, p. 73). The formal structure of syllabus, according to Denov and Daloz (2007), was reminiscent of the colonial era and did not best serve the needs of current students. The interviewee described education in the context of Sierra Leone as follows:

Free primary education is available; the problem is the poor quality of basic education. It's all down to available resources. The quality of students progressing to university has to improve; it's reliant on a decent level of exam results achieved at secondary level. Implications of costs of university attendance must be considered.

[...]

We need INGOs and international agencies to intervene and bridge the funding gap. Good quality education has to be universally available otherwise it affects tertiary education. UNICEF and UNESCO sponsor basic education programmes. UNESCO is beginning to work on education initiatives in English-speaking West Africa. Politics are involved, all sectors are politicised, this is what has eaten the fabric of the country. The president is chancellor of all the main universities. The principal of FBC is also the vice-chancellor. Many academics and bureaucrats with political involvement work primarily to protect their position which undermines the status quo. University staff should be independent, non-partisan. It's ok for students to protest, but those in administration should not be involved in politics.

[...]

A census was completed at school level; now an overview is required to identify educational priorities and requirements. A national educational survey should be carried out supported by donors and partners. Since the war there has been a focus on developing human resources at the expense of infrastructure reconstruction and protection of natural resources. We need to carry out a comprehensive SWOT [strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats] analysis of the entire system to identify strengths and weaknesses and highlight the main issues.

[...]

There is no point in building schools until a needs assessment has been carried out. Policy makers and advisors are aware of priorities and key issues, but politics means that initiatives are selected and carried out in a haphazard way. Education must relate to livelihoods, there is a need for technical and vocational training and careers advice. Mining companies are active, but Sierra Leone has only ten mining engineers. We used to have a good technical college. We need to construct adult education centres in the provinces.

(Researcher interview, B11, 2013)

As in previous interviewees, the participant referred to sectors damaged by the politicisation of government ministries. Similar statements - that candidates were frequently appointed to senior positions for which they were not adequately qualified because they were favoured by particular government ministers - were made by officials in The Office of National Statistics (Interview B12) and the FSU (Interview B6). The interviewee was of the opinion that increased external financial aid could solve internal problems in the sector but given the evident high levels of corruption (the education sector is reputedly the worst affected), the idea that bridging the funding gap alone is a route to improved outcomes appears unrealistic.

It seems more likely that it would create greater opportunities for increased corruption without any guarantee of an improvement in results. Reliance on a rise in external funding as a solution to problems in the sector represented once more the abnegation of responsibility by senior bureaucrats. It appeared to be easier to blame a lack of external funding than it was to take responsibility for the extent of dysfunction within government structures. The problem was evidenced in the GCR (2010) which delivered an indictment of the sector, including the government funded UPE initiative. Conversations with senior bureaucrats suggested that 'blaming' the system allowed the GoSL to deny its responsibility to carry out its remit, implying that the government was part of the problem. I propose that the GoSL should be required to take its share of responsibility for its role in perpetuating a situation that undermines any serious prospect of encouraging socio-economic progress for the groups being discussed.

This interview provided a senior bureaucrat's perspective on the corruption that is endemic in the system in general and the education sector in particular. The interviewee once more characterised corruption as an abstract notion, rather than as an immediate issue that required urgent action that had to be taken by him and his department colleagues. Issues that were flagged up and described in this interview indicated that there was a dysfunctional bureaucratic hierarchy which lacked capacity and was disconnected from those it was supposed to support (as was also highlighted in Interview B8). Inevitably this would most likely disproportionately affect those who were already the most disadvantaged or vulnerable, i.e., women and children. The conversation also provided insight into the realities of bureaucratic life, giving a frank and rather personal perspective. When asked if the political and socio-economic situation in Sierra Leone was better or worse now than five years ago, the statistician replied without hesitation; it is now "Far worse."

Another explanation volunteered by this senior government official was that policymakers and senior bureaucrats occupied secure positions, which afforded them status but left them vulnerable to falling out of favour within an extremely fragile political, social and economic structure. For added protection, they therefore directed their energy towards cultivating relationships with those who enjoyed influence in the higher echelons of power. This fitted with my premise that bureaucrats were either completely unaware of the needs of the disadvantaged or chose to not engage, preferring instead to maintain, or if possible, elevate, their own status. Senior bureaucrats were detached from those they were paid to serve, preferring instead to protect and benefit themselves, as is illustrated further in the following interview.

Interview B12 - Senior Statistician (Sierra Leone Office of National Statistics):

This interview provided a summary of the national context, characterising the situation as “a system rotten from the top”, but which the interviewee adhered to and played a prominent role in. He reiterated comments made by previous participants and then he went further, suggesting there was election-rigging and corruption at the highest levels. Like other interviewees, he expressed concerns regarding the weakness and fragility of the state (see also Interview A1) and identified an absence of government commitment to implementing national education and health development initiatives.

I propose that the senior bureaucratic class in Sierra Leone used their position as the way out of a corrupt, poorly resourced and defective system which offered little in the way of financial security, resources and support to carry out the task. Interviewees suggested that, in order to make personal progress, the Sierra Leonean bureaucrat, a person with a lot to lose, must be ‘selfish’. The individual must devote energy to patronage of someone of greater importance; someone who can offer them reward and status. Though it is was not without risk: if the patron is ousted the bureaucrat loses all. This, as is alluded to below, was the preferred route taken by bureaucrats aspiring to financial and social security for themselves and their family:

The cost of living has risen but salaries remain extremely low. Statistics show a growth in business confidence [at the time of interview], increased investment, a rise in foreign trade but the majority of the population, nearly 6,000,000 people, continue to live in extreme poverty.

Politics and Corruption:

The elections were fixed in 2007 and 2012. Much ill-gotten wealth was flaunted in the run-up to the election, promises were made, money spent, nothing happened after the election. Mining companies spent large sums during the election to return the government to power. Significant malpractice took place, government ministers received large sums of money to distribute to gain support, US\$5 million was given to the head of state, US\$1 million to each of a selected group of government ministers, there could have been serious trouble. People made a conscious decision not to go back to the bush [as happened during the rebel war]. It is common practice for false allegations to be levelled against officials in public office, which paves the way for them to be replaced by the president’s cronies who may be unqualified for the job.

[...]

Swathes of the population are suppressed, deprived of sources of income, there is little evidence of any trickle-down. There is no commitment to provide services and increase literacy rates. This could be interpreted as a government tactic to maintain power.

[...]

There is a lot of corruption, the average person is aware of what is going on. It's a battle for resources, those with access to resources become enriched. Resources even for statistical work have on occasion been procured fraudulently. Recently ministers were called for an accounts meeting to be told, "there is no money, there is money for salaries but none for subventions."

[...]

I have serious concerns that the president could change the constitution to enable him to be re-elected for a third term. Each minister would be given US\$1 million to ensure support, it is a real possibility. At some point in the not too distant future I honestly believe we could head back to being a one-party state and descend into chaos; there's a limit to how much people can suffer.

(Researcher interview, B12, 2013)

Summary of Group B: Interviews 6-12

Conversations with senior government officials highlighted some of the fundamental problems faced by ministries and departments responsible for improving the status of women.

Interviewees focused on the challenges presented by patriarchy and by the traditional and cultural practices and the impact these issues have on women. There was frequent mention of corruption and reference to the influence of nepotism and cronyism; even senior bureaucrats portrayed themselves as disempowered. The majority of interviewees took no responsibility and offered few constructive solutions to resolving the problems. These interviews indicate that across a range of government agencies there was a general absence of support or representation of women and girls who were suffering extreme deprivation.

5.4 Group C. Interviews 13-21: Women's Advocacy Groups, Networks and Associations

Interviews C 13-21 provide details relating to the structure and operation of the women's networks that emerged organically as a result of women coming together in the post-conflict period. Many women were displaced during the war, and in the aftermath of the conflict they found support within groups as they began to reconstruct their lives. One example of women's collective action was in Makeni, the capital of the northern province of Bombali (see Interview C19). In response to protracted periods of rebel occupation, women challenged the combatants, demanded respect, and asserted their right to retain a sufficient quantity of the produce the rebels had seized to feed their families. They succeeded and established a *modus vivendi* for the duration of the conflict. Members of the group did not volunteer to discuss demands the rebels made of them in return for the concessions (see Interview C16).

In the post-conflict period, necessity encouraged smaller groups to join together in collective efforts to survive. Networks were gradually set up and women, now more confident, demanded representation by councillors. Several networks have since expanded, demonstrating the strengths women derive from the essential support and collective effort and opportunities that these types of organisational structures offer (Kabeer, 1999, p. 288). Women set up initiatives to establish basic healthcare and education in the community without government support, sometimes backed by NGOs or INGOs. Larger groups aligned themselves with the networks, finding this strengthened their position when demanding access to training and seeking to gain skills. This would potentially enable them to progress from their position of low status and marginalisation to a situation in which they had greater influence and participation in decision-making in the community. The support and solidarity provided by the network enabled them to move into positions of public office from where they could engage with politics in general and gender issues in particular. In some instances, women's networks connected between Freetown and outlying districts. Bombali and Tawopaneh women's networks gave women a collective voice, as well as affording them the opportunity to challenge the status quo and to move away from the deprived position they occupied within the rural community.

Excerpts of conversations presented in this section are taken from interviews with members of advocacy groups and give some indication of the role they fulfil for women. I attended a fund-raising evening organized by 50/50 - an elite, educated group of professional women - whose members were mobilising influential contacts in national networks and government to raise money on behalf of disadvantaged community women. The group focuses on advocacy training that prepares women to take up political positions and to function as parliamentarians. 50/50's goal at the time was to achieve the 30% quota for female parliamentarians. The organisation's goals were impressive, but in conversation with one of the founding members it became apparent that 50/50's base was in Freetown and it had a far lighter presence in the provinces. While its political stance was progressive and it evidently fulfilled an important function in advancing women's position, it was less in touch with women at the grassroots level and was also less active on their behalf. This was confirmed in comments made by the coordinator of the Women in Agriculture and Nutrition Extension (see Interview B7), as well as in data I collected in other interviews. 50/50 was nearing completion of the construction of the Gender and Women's Leadership Training Institute, an imposing academic training centre on Tower Hill in central Freetown, which would be dedicated to women's education and training.

This interview was conducted with a former Sierra Leonean Member of Parliament. The interviewee appeared confident that there was comprehensive implementation of the Gender Bills. She is one of 50/50's founding members and her grandparents came from Nova Scotia. She reflected on the education context in the past and present and discussed the role of 50/50 stating that:

The British made sure everyone received an education. Five children came from the provinces to live with us and we sent them to school. We shared everything. This system stopped during the war. Now there is very little money and often no work. Children are obliged to go out and sell and send money back to the family.

[...]

The main problem is a lack of educated people. A comprehensive study of the educational system requires to be carried out [sic]. The universal primary education initiative has flooded the system and there is a lack of trained teachers. The standard is particularly low in the villages: the schools take care of the children for a few hours, but the big question is what is in the curriculum? Parents and community members set up schools, the premises are no good, the roofs leak during the rains, the environment is poor. What type of education are the children receiving? Is it worthwhile that they go to these schools?

[...]

The organisation is effective outside Freetown with active coordinators in all sixteen districts encouraging communities to come together and discuss major issues including the need to send children to school. 50/50 continues to work to achieve the 30% quota of female parliamentarians. In the last election only twelve women were elected compared to sixteen in the previous government. This problem was commented on by Oxfam's senior official who confirmed that all nominations have to be agreed by the appropriate chief which can be a problem.

Women used to be trained as traditional birth attendants [TBAs] by the older generation, often by their grandmothers, now this doesn't happen which means the TBAs don't have the experience. They may only receive a few days training, they don't have the expertise if there are complications, for example a breech birth.

Young mothers are now being treated for fistulas, previously they were regarded as witches, so there is progress, they are not rejected and shunned by their communities so frequently now. Many women may be five miles from their nearest health clinic which is too far. A lot of children are lost, but the families cope. If a woman resists continuing having children, the husband is likely to take another wife.

During the war when the men were fighting women came forward, now more women occupy decision-making positions. It isn't obligatory for councillors to have completed their education, many have only reached the first year of JSS but in Freetown all women at least go to primary school and standards are better than in secondary school.

(Researcher interview, C13, 2014)

The above interviewee reflected on women's position and the forced changes that took place in society as a result of the conflict. She presented a nostalgic view of the colonial period which she remembered with some affection from her childhood, times past when there was 'order'. Several older interviewees also spoke of colonial times with nostalgia, times when there was 'order and stability and things worked'. Her statement that, "in Freetown, all women at least go to primary school and standards are better than in secondary school" (in agreement with the next interviewee, a gender specialist) masks the fact that although *nearly all* girls are enrolled in primary school, the environment and standards are extremely variable (see Chapter Six). Moreover, large numbers drop out before completion of this first stage in their education. Based on my observations and research it is clear that most (though not all) families aspired for their children to be educated, but they would forgo that education (especially for girls rather than boys) when they needed income earned from children working for the family's survival, which was commonplace.

Interviews C13 above and C14 below illustrate how the interviewees constructed narratives from an elite perspective that showed less empathy and understanding of the underprivileged.

Interview C14 - Senior Official and Gender Specialist (50/50):

In this interview, a renowned Sierra Leonean academic and gender specialist asserted that secret societies "do not influence girls much anymore." This was contrary to the views expressed by the majority of community members I was in contact with during my fieldwork. Her opinion was that "patriarchy is everywhere. Men dominate everywhere it is not only true of Sierra Leone." It is possible that this participant, an academic who functions on the international academic circuit and spends significant periods of time out of the country, was separated from the lives and day-to-day realities of women by virtue of her elite status. Sierra Leone's foremost gender specialist explained the lack of historical context people have in the country:

There are few authoritative books on the history of Sierra Leone. There is data on various aspects of development, but information is fragmented, there is no complete narrative. Young people cannot connect recent events with what happened in the 60s and 70s.

She cited mismanagement of resources as the key factor that had contributed to Sierra Leone's economic and political decline during those decades. She continued:

Western scholarship assumed superiority over the tradition of oral history and in the process expunged parts of the collective memory, personal experience and identity. Memories were written down long after the event, so they didn't reflect the true history of Sierra Leone; no one knows the real story.

[...]

No one has asked the people. There was no active history being taught, no indigenous historians, history was being written about elite sectors. There's a danger that others are telling us who we are in the world. War transformed history and memory; people were traumatised. Women were largely missing. There is a lack of a gender perspective, only now is it diversifying to reflect women. Women, mostly illiterate, are left behind, their main source of information continues to be via oral history. Gender Bills passed in 2007, followed by further legislation to protect women in 2009, 2010 and 2013 mean advancement, groups are working tirelessly to increase representation. Women's empowerment is an uphill struggle. Women play a significant role in agriculture and fisheries; women must be given access to land. 53% of women are engaged in farming, they need links to be made to processing, marketing, transportation and storage, there's still a long way to go.

[...]

We lie to ourselves; we tell ourselves we are peaceful, that we get on easily. The reality is that we are a deeply contentious country; at different points in time we have fought against each other. There are ethnic issues, a huge gap between those who have access to resources and those who don't. The fixation with ethnic groups poisoned post-colonial history.

(Researcher interview, C 14, 2014)

This interview coincided with a book launch I attended, a history of Sierra Leone written by a group of Sierra Leonean academics, most of whom were based outside the country. Their aim was to produce an authentic account of history of the country and to do so entirely from a Sierra Leonean point of view. The intention was to address the issue of history being told from a colonial perspective. Six copies of the book had been published and were to be placed in university and college libraries. At the book launch, the plan was challenged by a member of the audience who said that when she went to school there were books, now there were none. She wanted to know if there were plans for commercial publication of the history book that would make it accessible for all students throughout the country. I noted that I frequently saw textbooks dating from the colonial period for sale in Freetown markets and on street stalls.

Next I present excerpts from interviews with members of several women's networks that provide insights into the benefits women have derived from their collaborations.

Interview C15 - Founding Member Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE):

FAWE, a pan African organisation that supports education of women and girls, established a school in central Freetown during the war in 1995 to provide education for displaced and under-privileged girls. The founding member I interviewed explained to me why this had been necessary and what the organisation does.

Many girls were out-of-school, they had no support from their families during and after the war. They had lost one or both parents and often other family members who could have provided for them. In the circumstances they were tempted to strike up relationships with older men in order to survive. Many had children before they came to us, they had lost years of education. Our rapid education programme has supported almost 3,000 students, mainly girls.

[...]

Our work is mainly to help reduce illiteracy and through education to reduce the school drop-out rate. Our aim is to support our students through education so that they can access global resources that will equip them with skills related to the work place. We have a computer lab. at our school where students learn I.T. and can become accustomed to using the internet. We teach them practical and vocational skills all with the aim of fostering girl's independence. They can study degrees in car maintenance, electrics, plumbing, carpentry, we provide the tools, it's unusual for girls to have these skills but it helps them to be independent and earn a living.

[...]

We have a sub-committee that is investigating gender disparities in education. We run a weekly radio programme on girl's education.

(Researcher interview C15, 2013)

FAWE was an example of a large organisation that implemented excellent programmes.

However, my conversation with the founding member inclined me to reflect that the programme approach and content could benefit from a revision of structure and content to suit the needs of today's students.

During my second field trip to northern Sierra Leone in 2012, I was introduced to The Community Action for Development Programmes and Services (CADEPS) women's network based in Bombali district, which was established in the post-conflict period. Initially, it brought women together and supported them in the reconstruction of their lives. But now it was expanding and, as it gained momentum, its reach and influence was spreading. At the time of my meeting with the committee and group members the focus of its programmes was on training and assistance in setting up and managing micro-enterprises.

Group Discussion, Interview C16: Community Action for Development Programmes and Services (CADEPS):

In this discussion led by the President of CADEPS, members of the group detailed the formation of the organisation and outlined its main functions. One member stated that the organisation:

...was set up in 1996 in Freetown by the founder of the network. The organisation came up with the initiative designed to support women, children and youths and started working with the Bombali group. They trained fifty vulnerable women in Kamakin, Kamalo in the Sandaloko Chiefdom. They learned gara dyeing, soap-making, tailoring, weaving and carpentry. After training start-up kits were provided as women could not afford to buy the basic materials. Each woman received the essential equipment on completion of the three month course and continued to be monitored every two months. Overall progress was good. The scheme loaned Le 300,000 [US\$81] after the start-up which had to be paid back at a rate of Le 10,000 [US\$3] per month for a period of one year (Le 120,000), [US\$32]. The women were allowed to keep the remaining Le 180,000 [US\$49] plus profit.

[...]

In this way the women learned how to manage money. Two days training was given so three people were able to manage groups. Some were illiterate, some literate. It was necessary to come down to their level. They were all numerate. Training was given in life skills. They would buy chickens from the village and bring them in to the town as back-up to sell if necessary. Usually everyone has one meal per day.

[...]

There is lots of trade within one or two miles in the diamond and gold mining area. It's easy for women to trade, to work as petty traders. They are used to coping and coming up with ideas. My husband and I (CADEPS President and husband) are involved in micro-finance. This is a first and only chance we have, if it's misused then we won't get another chance. There are twelve groups with twenty-five women in each group. Only Makeni has a larger group. Six more women joined this month and six more plan to join next month. Funding comes from the National Aid Secretariat which has links with the government. It takes care of HIV/AIDS programmes.

(Researcher interview, C16, 2012)

Recurring themes of struggle, resilience and determination were emerging, which revealed the potential social capital within group members: women clearly derived enormous benefits from forming groups. More recently the network had benefited from training in advocacy which had increased their confidence to make demands of local councillors. They had been encouraged to move further afield and as the network spread out to more distant villages and settlements it gave the organisation a stronger voice, which was resulting in their demands being met with positive responses more often.

Networks I visited were important examples of community members taking the lead in directing local development and pioneering small-scale projects that increased their own productivity (and earnings). As stated earlier, I found even more evidence of this type of cohesion in rural districts than in the town or city, as is illustrated in the next interview.

The Bombali District Women's Network (BDWN) was established in 2004, championed by CADEPS and managed by its president. The BDWN was another example of women finding a stronger voice through establishing networks that extended their reach. The following interviews C17, C18 and C19, are composed of extracts from group discussions and comments made during my visits to the women's networks.

Group Discussion, Interview C17 - Gbanti Kamaranka (rural):

This interview was with several of the original members who had set up a women's group in 2004 in the post-conflict period in response to the need for community development. Later, they formed the BDWN, which continued to expand and came to function as an umbrella organisation with sub-groups consisting of around five hundred local women's groups that formed a tight supportive network. The structure linked communities that consisted of a mix of inhabitants, some of whom had lived in the area for generations, while others had settled there as a result of displacement during the war or in the post-conflict period. The organisation was a striking example of community solidarity. Group members described how they had been marginalised and how they had benefited from coming together. "We had been marginalised for so long that at first there was no sense of unity, so we benefited greatly from coming together." Members also indicated that they were aware of the importance of becoming involved in politics and gender issues. Kabeer (1994) highlighted the fragility of individual efforts and the importance of collective empowerment, emphasising the need for women to become involved in politics and gender issues. The interviews illustrate how this can be achieved and highlight some of the difficulties in doing so:

Everyone wanted their own lives, we were tired of being behind the men. We wanted to be recognized in our own right so we came together with one voice, we were supported by two 'honourables' [MPs] who advocated for women to become council members.

Members of the group, the majority of whom had no formal education described how they had progressed:

It was crucial that we made a stand, through acting together, we could push women to go further and achieve more. Initially the men were not happy with the movement as they were jealous. It took patience and courage to explain and to sensitise male members of the communities. Men were invited to attend meetings in an attempt to help them understand, we wanted them to join us, to share and benefit from the structure we had created.

HIV/AIDS programmes were put in place and women from all walks of life - traders, farmers, teachers - became part of the network. The group believed it was essential for women to be actively involved in politics and in gender issues, and members of the BDWN were instrumental in initiating several community projects.

We hold monthly meetings and we make donations during the dry season. We've set up schemes that train women in weaving, tailoring, and soap-making to increase livelihood options.

Provisional plans were being put in place so that members could take out micro-loans for business development. Network members agreed in principal that interest should be paid, as long as it was not too high, and there was consensus regarding the need for training in how to set up, structure and run the schemes.

We trade on the basis of purchasing goods for resale when money is available which is really difficult, trading is seasonal and during the rains everyone has less money. Business has to adapt during the rains, it's far harder, we have to rely on petty trading to survive.

Women expressed dissatisfaction. They felt they were expected to take more than their fair share of responsibility (compared to their husbands) although they continued to turn to men for advice.

The traditional system involves women taking care of the home, "with the men sitting looking at us!" "We are the primary breadwinners, we pay for the school fees." "The men are not able to run their affairs. We have to come down to their level. As a result of women's regular monthly savings we can make donations of blankets, shoes, books, pens and other basic items to families who are struggling.

(Researcher interview, C17, 2012)

At the time of my visit, the network had been invited to meet with the national board in Freetown and members were also travelling to outlying villages to make connections with new groups. One adjacent district was using the network's structure as a model, and they had asked the BDWN to 'educate' local women. BWDN members were planning the next stage in their development which was to extend the reach of the network, recruit more members and train women in nearby villages and farms.

The network had an office and a secretary, but no computers, and all members wore I.D. cards and a uniform called an Ashobi. Women described their frustration; "We want to stop clapping behind the men!" (Researcher interview, C17, 2012), and recalled how individual efforts had not made sufficient impact to improve women's social and economic situation. In order to gain strength, they had chosen to work collectively, to work together towards positive

improvements to their lives that would eventually lead to them achieving equality in society. The next group represents a network member of the that links with the parent body, the BWDN. Some of the women had experienced negative reactions from community members who were suspicious of their activities.

Group Discussion, Interview C18 - Tawopaneh Women's Community Network:

In the discussion, members of this network described the hardships they were enduring:

We went into the community and suggested forming the group. The women were farmers, petty traders, not very advanced. The idea was to target the vulnerable. It was difficult at times, now they are coping with us. Some men think CADEPS is setting women against them. There are claims that being a member of the group leads to prostitution and there is a lack of respect.

One of the members, found the constraints difficult in the early days: she was really suffering. She was selling I.D. cards and registration cards to start with. In spite of her difficult circumstances she said:

If you don't relent you will succeed. At first husbands did not accept the group. I talked to my husband and called a meeting, but he wouldn't come. He couldn't see any money or any benefits.

There was too much talk, it took patience we had to find ways of helping the community. One member wanted to set up a groundnut farm and process the groundnuts. At that time, I used soda and palm oil to make soap. I talked to my family and started a small group. Next I applied for micro-finance. By then my husband understood. There are three groups and they operate a system that first allocates one third of the money to the community, then two thirds goes into savings. I find this balance really difficult: I believe you have to satisfy yourself and not the community! The community is scattered which makes it even harder for members to benefit and remain strong. The chief is consulted first with the group's aims and plans. He has given a piece of land for a group which has been divided into plots for a farming project. All the businesses such as weaving are run through the parent body.

(Researcher interview, C18, 2012))

In this interview I was reminded of the formality of social structures and of the dominant patriarchal structure of society. Irrespective of women's advancement, decisions were made by the chief who was the principal landowner, and communities remained dependent on his beneficence. He exerted his authority and had the ultimate power to sanction or reject projects. The next interviewee, a member of the Cooked Rice Sellers Association, described life as she experienced it during lengthy periods of occupation and repression that communities suffered at the hands of rebel forces.

Interview C19 - Cooked Rice Sellers Association:

The female member of the Association recounted her experience of rebel held Makeni during the war and she described an extremely challenging period that she lived through. She spoke of the role of women's solidarity in the face of threats made by the rebel groups, describing ways in which women found strength through the network they formed that led to their participation in politics.

We formed the group in 2000 during the war when rebels were living in the district. They ate the rice which the women cooked for them. We acted as servants threatened with flogging if we didn't provide for them. There was no law, chiefs, police, nothing! One day they ate my rice and I asked them to pay. They slapped me and I slapped them back. The commander had a pistol with eight rounds. I was so angry I didn't feel scared. We formed an organisation because of that incident, and we went to their headquarters and reported them. We had a social welfare coordinator who was non-partisan which helped. We came together, all the women joined forces to oppose them. We were really worried; we were not even treated as human beings.

The challenge was to convince the rebels not to use violence. We stayed together and they learned to give us maximum respect. It was entirely due to the strength of the women's groups that our communities survived. We started advocacy during those times; we realized we had to represent ourselves. I met with them and laid down the ground rules. We were working with the peacekeepers, ECOMOG. Then I became a coordinator and I took part in the peace negotiations. CADEPS, the women's network association, approached us and Hancile, another large organisation which supported the communities, brought everyone together to take part in ballots for the election. Women were allowed to go as far as the Guinea border, everyone came out in the run up to the election. I believe it is crucial that women participate in politics. We have a lot of women councillors in the north.

(Researcher interview, C19, 2012)

The interviewee described the strength afforded by women's collective action during the conflict and how women's groups were key to their survival. She said that she had played a part in the peace talk that began in 1999 with the Lomé Negotiations, which laid the foundations for the beginning of the peace process, and she stressed the importance of women's participation in politics.

Interview C20 - 'One Word' Women's Association:

In this interview a member of the 'One Word' women's association provides details of and insights into loan systems as they were practised in their communities and the stringent measures that were taken against defaulters:

One Word Women's Association was formed in 2006 and has around 100 members. Most of the women are farmers²⁵ who carry out community farming. Before any loan is taken there has to be evidence of some savings, some collateral. If money is loaned for small micro-finance projects which run at a loss, the money will be lost [...] If anyone runs away, they will be found and taken to the police.

Loans are taken from ARG bank, CCF and Rokel. In the rainy season no loans are taken. Le 3,000,000 is loaned to the group with each member getting Le 300,000 [US\$81] in the dry season for six months. Rugiatu saves Le 10,000 [US\$3] per day in the dry season. Interest is Le 10,000 [US\$3] on a Le 300,000 loan. Interest earned on savings is low [...] the treasurer is responsible for keeping the money. Loans are used for trade, education, school fees.

One woman's husband forsook her in 1999. He didn't like an independent woman, so he left. There is a national scheme which gives Le 1,000,000 [US\$27] per month. Anyone taking this sum who cannot pay, runs away, women leave, they cannot pay, they are caught by the police and put in the cells. Rugiatu and the others actively discourage bank loans they charge too much, CEPISA and the network do not borrow from the bank, they only use it to deposit money.

(Researcher interview, C20, 2012)

This interview shows how loans operate in practice and how they are used and gives an indication of the harshness of the system as well as the measures taken against individuals and families who fail to repay them.

Interview C21 - Lumley Market Women's Association:

Mammy Queen, so known because she was the very first trader in the market thirty-two years ago, was a board member of the Lumley Market Women's Association. Like other traders who struggled, she was striving to earn a living to feed her nine children, which relied on her selling a minimum of a bag of rice a day. Lacking capital to expand their businesses, traders were forced to turn to friends for loans; this is why, I was told, traders needed to be trained in business methods and sustainability of businesses. Mammy Queen said there was strong unity among the traders who came together when decisions had to be made. At the time of writing, Lumley market was in a state of flux, road widening had forced traders (some local and others from districts outside Freetown) to occupy a reduced space along the roadside. They were finding the harsh economic climate combined with unavailability of micro-credit was affecting their ability to invest in new business. To be allowed to sell during the day, the traders paid a tax, then a separate tax was applied that authorised them to conduct business in the evening.

²⁵ The community farming system sets aside some of the produce from the 'gardens' (farmed by women) for the family then the rest is shared among the community. Farming in the inland valley swamps (IVS) is another system of sharing which functions in the dries when produce grown in the IVS will be shared among families in the community.

The market had no basic facilities such as: drinking water, toilets, electricity or refuse collection (Researcher interview, C21, 2012). The interview was conducted during the interviewee's daytime trading in Lumley market and revealed the extremely harsh climate that traders operated under in order to make a living that would sustain themselves and their families.

Summary of Group C - Interviews 13-21:

I learned through my interaction with members of women's networks and associations that they had joined together and taken responsibility for the development of their neighbourhoods and communities. In these conversations, women described how they had been forced to start again as a result of the conflict and displacement and described the trauma they have suffered. They told how they had found security in coming together and setting up and consolidating groups. Initially this had been a means of survival and was to create solidarity; but small groups had since evolved into networks and links were spreading through adjoining villages and settlements. Networks of this kind were particularly strong and more widespread in rural communities where women lived in chiefdoms and where, until the networks were formed, elders had been accustomed to having absolute authority, even among recently established communities. Women described the structures they had set up; they were proud of their achievements and enthusiastic regarding their aspirations for the future, both for themselves and for their families. These interviews presented an entirely different perspective based on innovative and creative community development.

5.5 Emerging Key Themes

The data presented in this chapter added an important dimension to my research. The twenty-one interviewees that comprise Groups A, B and C shed light on issues within the bureaucratic system from both professional and personal perspectives. The interviewees informed me of the challenges that bureaucrats faced in their position as senior administrators and confirmed fundamental issues that negatively affect women's socio-economic progress. At this stage in my research, culture and traditional practices were emerging as key themes that had an obvious and profound impact on the socio-economic progress of certain people. The interviews highlighted that particular groups were implementing informal programmes that replaced extremely weak bureaucratic structures and were becoming a substitute for state support. The remainder of this chapter reflects on the themes that emerged in each set of interviews.

Key Themes in Group A - Limited Connection and Commitment to Communities:

In Interviews A1 and A4 senior INGO officials referred to an array of development initiatives that departments and organisations were charged with delivering. There was less clarity on detail of how such large-scale projects that required experienced teams of well-trained practitioners would be implemented. Officials, I noted, were mainly office-based. In my observation, senior OXFAM and BRAC officials who supervised community projects were in close contact with fieldworkers and spent time in the communities, which improved channels of communication and increased awareness of local issues. OXFAM in its women's leadership programme emphasised the important role women play in society and had produced a guide to promoting women's participation. The organisation employed innovative methods in resolution of social and economic problems in the community, which was more likely to lead to successful project delivery and impact, and BRAC was equally innovative in the design of community development initiatives (discussed further in Chapter Six).

Senior officials in Interviews A2 and A3 were familiar with the locality, the socio-economic positioning of the populations, and the main issues affecting the communities. With this local knowledge they were well-positioned to implement innovative initiatives and when programmes showed signs of positive results, they could then plan to replicate them. One example was confidence-building courses to reduce GBV that were run by Oxfam and made available to local women. Workers in both BRAC and Oxfam reached village communities and were making inroads into reducing the influence of patriarchal culture and traditions. I was aware of discrepancies that existed between national and international staff that led to competent national staff, who were paid less than their international counterparts, seeking positions outside Sierra Leone to increase their pay. International staff had far better living and working conditions and were given regular sabbaticals that were not available to national staff. In addition, most international staff were employed on short-term contracts, then they moved to another country, meaning their commitment was likely to be more superficial.

Key Themes in Group B - Government Dysfunction:

Senior government officials told me that there was a strong culture of nepotism and cronyism within key positions in ministries that were occupied by the president's close associates, and they frequently lacked the necessary skills and experience to carry out the job they were given. The security and status attached to prestigious bureaucratic positions helped them survive and prosper in an extremely harsh socio-economic environment. On several occasions I was told by participants that a prime concern was to secure and then retain a key position. It was common

for allegiance to be declared to a government minister or higher senior official that would involve sums of money being paid to that person that would continue for the duration of the person's tenure (see interviews B6 and B12.) I was told by a research coordinator that he was expected to pay a month's salary in advance if he wanted to secure a position. As I concluded from data collected during interviews, some bureaucrats concerned with policy in government ministries and government departments appeared to be out-of-touch with the extremes of socio-economic deprivation endured by disadvantaged groups. I was told by several senior officials that it was impossible for them to fulfil their remit. They were powerless to effect change for several main reasons. Senior government officials suffered from a lack of resources, an absence of training and low staffing capacity within their departments. One official was told that there was no money for salaries and only a small sum available for basic buildings maintenance. Officials complained that they usually received what they considered to be extremely low salaries (although these could be construed as extremely high relative to the GDP per capita) months in arrears. Departments were starved of resources and training and levels of staff capacity were poor, which meant that commitment and morale were extremely low. Most interviewees were demoralised and felt unsupported. They reported that a large proportion of funding allocated to initiatives was siphoned off and what was left was far too meagre to properly implement programmes.

The emerging picture was of a weakened and deeply flawed bureaucratic structure in which there was a risk of distortion of perspectives on community development. As Interview B12, the senior statistician in the Office of National Statistics stated: "Those with access to resources become enriched." Similar sentiments were expressed in Interview B6. I found little evidence of senior government officials actively challenging aspects of patriarchy that denigrated women, and there were few examples of constructive solutions to gender issues being offered. Officials blamed the problems on faulty systems, an accusation which gave them latitude to absolve themselves of responsibility for their failure to carry out their designated task: dedicated support and improvement of the socio-economic position in the lives of the most vulnerable, i.e., women and children. In Interview B6 it was claimed that traditional leaders had far too much authority in the community; change was needed to reduce their supremacy and their control over women. The same interviewee discussed the challenges presented by unacceptably high rates of GBV and SBV against women and girls, and she was heavily critical of the broad cultural acceptance of VAWG. But she was also reluctant to draw direct connections between traditional leaders' authority, acceptance of GBV and SBV, and women's marginalisation.

Key Themes in Group C - Strength of Support & Comments on Function:

These interviews illustrated the strength of support derived from women's networks which inspired women with confidence. In Group Interview C17 the women were sufficiently self-assured to openly criticise men's capacities. In Interview C19 the interviewee recounted the tale of confronting rebels during the civil war and demanding food rations from them and in Interview C20, the woman concerned stood her ground when her husband left because, she said, he could not cope with his newly independent wife. These represent rare occurrences in this steadfastly patriarchal society. I found members of women's networks in rural communities were pro-active in creating positive change in their own lives, effectively harnessing the agency and social and cultural capital that is accessible to them. Women were finding a stronger voice and making headway through support they derived from fellow group members.

CADEPS and other women's networks through the support they offered women enabled them to progress from survival levels towards greater freedom of choice. The data I collected in conversation with women's groups and women's networks provided evidence that they were part of an organic process of development that was spreading through neighbourhoods and communities inspiring women with confidence. Rural (and some urban) networks that were not connected to formal development were setting up small-scale projects (such as gara-dyeing, soap-making and tailoring), utilising their skills and maximising their earnings. Many groups lacked business training and could therefore be vulnerable to exploitation. For example, some women farmers were reliant on selling their produce to larger commercial organisations (that have the capacity to transport goods to the market or the necessary means to export goods) were paid extremely low prices.

The representatives of the elite and educated women's groups in Interviews C13, C14, and C15 have fulfilled an extremely important purpose in validating women's status through establishing the Gender and Women's Leadership Training Institute. Members, who were ex-parliamentarians, demonstrated a commitment to commendable principles, but the data collected in these interviews indicated that they spent less time in direct contact with communities. As such, there was a risk that they were unaware of the reality of the lives of the women they apparently represented. I detected a lack of empathy with the extreme poor among these groups. In interview B7, for example, the interviewee was critical of women's advocacy organisations, suggesting they were political by nature and placed less emphasis on development of enduring relationships with women at the 'grassroots' level in urban slums, the provinces, and in rural villages which corresponds with my own observations.

5.6 Key Findings: the Impact of Corruption

Corruption takes many forms and it is undoubtedly endemic in the political, economic and social fabric of Sierra Leone as is shown throughout this thesis. For example, senior government officials complained that their salaries were extremely low and often they were paid in arrears, making it difficult for them and their families to survive. Some spoke of their colleague (but never themselves) being tempted to collude in so-called 'diversion of funds' to augment their apparently very low income.

Favours being granted to (paying) supporters, meant it was highly likely that bureaucrats holding key positions would not have the required qualifications, skills, or experience to do the job assigned to them. Persons who were appointed on the basis of nepotism would then be dependent on continued support from the patron who had elevated them to the senior position, which meant that the individual would be vulnerable to change and would work primarily to protect their position. This supposition is backed by comments made during interviews B7 and B12, and also by Chabal and Daloz (1999, p. 159-161) and Bolten (2012, pp. 238, 239) who discuss the same phenomenon. In several interviews, senior bureaucrats appeared to be at a distance from the responsibilities attached to their role. When taken together, the evidence suggests that it is likely that this culture permeated the entire bureaucratic hierarchy and was therefore a major factor in the failure of development initiatives to deliver on their stated aims.

'Diversion of funding' (i.e., misappropriation of funds) was a major form of corruption that filtered through various strata of society. Interview A5 detailed a specific example of this that contributed to the failure of a project that would have a major impact on local people, depriving them of basic services. Corruption of the political process was taking place throughout the country. In the run up to an election, politicians secured block votes through cultivating the Sowei and exploiting tribal allegiances. Assertions were made during the 2012 election race that Sia Koroma, the First Lady of Sierra Leone, had paid for up to 1,000 initiations ceremonies in order to secure votes from Mammy Queens (influential female chiefs) and their communities. Reports of lax operational structures and inadequate monitoring of large-scale operations within DFID, UN agencies (such as UNICEF), and other significant funders, meant prevention of corruption was ineffective. As such, misappropriation of funds took place within a weak system that substantially reduced availability of government and donor funding to carry out even the most essential health, education and welfare programmes, including during the EVD outbreak, which disproportionately affected the poorest and most vulnerable people.

5.7 Conclusion

Interviews in Groups A, B and C offered differing perspectives on the major issues acting against women's socio-economic progress at multiple levels of society. Rhetoric used by officials in groups A and B referenced the language of development, there were allusions to programmes that were designed to deliver women's 'empowerment' but there was only marginal comprehension of how 'empowerment' translated into the local environment and what it actually meant to the women in the community. Women in interviews C 16 – 21 presented their translation of empowerment and the place it occupied in their lives. They related how formation of groups and networks gave them support and helped them overcome the immense challenges they faced. They gave practical accounts of how they worked to improve their lives, a concept of 'empowerment' far removed from the official language of development, it was directed by the women themselves, an organic process that came from within. Fieldwork provided fresh insight into development issues affecting women and girls and confirming they remained unresolved. There was a consensus apparent among participants in all three Groups that action *should* be taken to reduce the negative impact of patriarchy, culture and traditional practices, issues that were understood to obstruct women's progress in the country. These conversations supported the premise that traditional customs and practices do exert control over women and girls, curtailing their freedom of choice and independence in key areas of their lives. Several participants suggested that change was required to reduce the power of traditional leaders who, they claimed, exercised their influence for their own aggrandisement.

A particular concern that emerged, highlighted by senior government officials, was how alarmingly widespread and commonly tolerated GBV and SBV were in Sierra Leone. But senior government bureaucrats responsible for education and health policy implementation blamed this on circumstances beyond their control: they denied responsibility for programme failure and seldom offered tangible solutions. Other officials in ministries and government departments claimed that the fault lay in inadequate funding and a general lack of resources. The overall results of the data collected from the three groups indicated that there are serious defects in the reach, structure and delivery of development programmes, but the participants generally offered little in the way of solutions. One final observation I wish to make at this stage in my investigation is that the primary data collected exposed a system that operated on two separate levels with marginal overlap.

Many of the stories that emerged from interviews in this chapter were of extreme deprivation and vulnerability, but progress by the GoSL toward improving these peoples' circumstances was all but imperceptible. The data I present in the next chapter gave me the opportunity to triangulate these perspectives with the views of interviewees from urban and rural communities. They describe their daily lives, providing a further dimension to the picture: women's own experiences of low social status in Sierra Leone. Only once I had completed this process, would I then be in a position to reflect properly on the problems and move towards formulating options that I considered have potential to minimise, and contribute to eradicating, the obstacles that block women and girl's progression in Sierra Leone.

6. LIFE IN THE COMMUNITY - FIELDWORK

By systematically transforming nature and social relations into the marketing of goods and services... development seems to be the greatest and most comprehensive undertaking of dispossession and expropriation for the benefit of the dominating minorities that has ever happened.

(Perrot cited by Latouche, 2009, p. 139)

6.1 Introduction

In Chapter Five, key themes emerged from interviews and discussions with government officials, INGO and NGO personnel, women's advocacy groups and women's networks. Participants in groups A and B provided insights into the official positions they occupied, and how they viewed and carried out their professional roles. In group C, participants in interviews 13-15 described their attitudes towards development, their involvement in the process, and those in 16-21 spoke of the measures they were taking on a practical level to rebuild their lives. Members of each group put forward differing perspectives giving insight into development and its associated issues, the latter group in particular discussing the impact on their lives.

In this chapter I move my critique forward to focus on populations in contrasting communities - urban and rural - with the aim of reaching a greater understanding of the different contexts of people's lives. I consider the experiences of women and children in urban and rural districts in order to determine the extent to which their reality corresponded with the perspectives recorded in Chapter Five that were put forward by bureaucrats and other interviewees. The urban areas I selected were in Kaningo (a district within Freetown city limits), where I had made contact with some inhabitants during my first scoping trip to Sierra Leone in 2009²⁶ (prior to this research project), and in Makeni (a major city in northern Sierra Leone). The rural areas were in villages and settlements in Kamaranka in the northern province of Bombali. The three environments (the majority of which I revisited) and their inhabitants allowed me to compare and contrast experiences of women in different contexts and over time. My decision was influenced by observing the resilience of women who functioned at survival levels without access to even the most basic services. I witnessed the agency and determination they employed to improve their circumstances without support from GoSL development initiatives.

²⁶ I conducted research during field visits in 2009 and 2011 on behalf of LMU ARSCDS that introduced me to Freetown and the provinces giving me a degree of background information on the socio-economic status of populations.

I constructed a picture of women's lives from the data I collected, which illustrates the degree of disadvantage they face, and reveals their priorities and needs and their aspirations for themselves and their children. I gathered information informally through observation, focus group discussions, group discussions, semi-structured interviews and conversations during field visits. My primary goal - within the limitations of time and budget I had available for fieldwork (which allowed for visits and return visits that ranged from 3-5 days between 2012 and 2014) - was to observe and interpret daily life as accurately as possible. I did so guided by residents and through working with Sierra Leonean assistants and professional workers who could clarify aspects of daily life, culture and tradition.

In the first section of this chapter, I focus on Kaningo, an example of an expanding urban district that does not have proximate or adequate health, education or welfare facilities.

From the data collected and the analysis of discussions and conversations, key themes emerged relating to issues that negatively affect women and girls. In the next section, I extend the scope of data collection to include the northern city of Makeni, then I move further north to rural settlements in and around Kamaranka, Bombali, twelve kilometres from Kamakwie and the border with Guinea, where I met female subsistence farmers. My aim during this fieldwork was to collect a balance of data covering the spectrum of socio-economic positioning of women and girls that existed in the three contrasting locations. First, I present edited group discussions (D22-25) from Kaningo, a selection of interviews conducted in Kaningo (E26-35), and from there I move north to Makeni (interviews F36-38). Finally, I report on general observations and comments made by participants in Bombali district (interviews G38-43), and then conclude with a summary of key themes and observations arising from data collection.

Group D. Group discussions 22-25: Kaningo

- 22. Kaningo women's group
- 23. Marimbo Water Women's Development Group (MWDG)
- 24. Members, "The Bench of Hope" young men's group, Kaningo
- 25. Members, "The Young Ladies of Kaningo" young women's group

Group E. Interviews 26-35: Kaningo

- 26. Student, 16 years
- 27. Kaningo resident since 1972
- 28. Kaningo councillor
- 29. Head teacher, Kaningo school, (government-assisted)
- 30. Teacher, Kakua International school, Kaningo

- 31. Head teacher, staff members, King of Kings School Kaningo
- 32. Proprietor, Paycy's Private Clinic, Kaningo
- 33. Lumley government hospital, matron and staff
- 34. Senior administrator, Milton Margai College for Education and Technology
- 35. Resident, Kaningo

Group F. Interviews 36-38: Makeni

- 36. Salon owner
- 37. Trainee hairdressers
- 38. Abused wife

Group G. Comments 39-43 (grouped under headings given below): Bombali:

- 39. Wives
- 40. Men's roles
- 41. Networking
- 42. Loans
- 43. Extreme hardship

The group discussions in Group E and the interviews in groups F and G present perspectives put forward by community residents and others who, because of their occupation all have a presence in the community. Data collected and presented in this chapter adds an important dimension to the debate that arose in Chapter Five, in that it contributes to developing a greater understanding of women's socio-economic positioning and the issues that directly affect women and obstruct their progress. The exchanges presented below have been edited to avoid (where possible) overly repetitive data in favour of presenting information that adds to and broadens the debate.

6.2 Background to Kaningo

Kaningo an area with around 25,000 inhabitants, according to a local chief²⁷, is situated within Freetown city boundaries. It stretches along the Lumley valley and up steep hillsides towards Hill Station where British officials and administrators lived during the colonial period. I spoke with older Lumley residents and an elderly chief who all lived there before the war during the 1980's. They told me that the district was once 'bushy' and was sparsely populated until an influx of people fleeing war began arriving during the 1991-2002 conflict. The population continued to grow in its aftermath, but despite its continuing expansion, Kaningo remains

²⁷ It should be noted that estimates of the population vary widely.

relatively isolated from the main city: it has no serviceable internal road network because of the hilly and rocky terrain. The number of residents settling in the valley escalated in recent years as people from rural districts migrated to the city. They moved in significant numbers into the district, beginning in the year 2000, at a time when cheaper land was being cleared and made available in Kaningo, allowing it accommodate the people came seeking housing and employment (including many who were displaced or who had been rebels). Many of the new arrivals erected makeshift dwellings known as *pan-bhodies* (traditional shacks) including on the least accessible hillsides, that were constructed from corrugated metal, wood and scrap materials. Kaningo, in spite of its expanding population, still lacks adequate amenities such as schools, hospitals, cemetery space and sports areas to serve the communities.

In the rains the district is prone to flooding and landslides due to soil erosion caused by deforestation. In August 2017 Sugarloaf Mountain in Regent fractured, and a gigantic mudslide cascaded down the hillside coursing through Kaningo. It claimed the lives of over 1,000 people. My rural fieldwork coordinator, a volunteer during the rescue operation, sent photos showing the vast scale of the damage and pictures of the victims, their bodies and body parts. I contacted the British press as he had requested in the hope of raising awareness of the extent of the devastation and to get help. A UK NGO, Street Child - Sierra Leone, launched an emergency appeal. My researcher, and everyone else affected, was deeply traumatised by the experience.

Kaningo has richer and poorer settlements dictated by either ease of access to or distance from infrastructure. The main road at the base of the valley runs through Lumley east towards Goderich a fishing village on the outskirts of Freetown and west towards the centre of Freetown. The inhabitants of Kaningo lack basic services such as clean water, sanitation, electricity and adequate housing, and road and bridge infrastructure, despite being situated within the city boundaries. Apart from one privately-owned clinic called Paycy's, and free basic maternity facilities paid for by a foreign resident, there is no other healthcare available in the vicinity for those with acute health problems, who may be immobile, or for the poorest without the means to travel outside the district. During fieldwork I found little evidence of effective contact, advice, support or representation by local councillors who were responsible for lobbying parliamentarians on behalf of residents. The ambitions and aspirations of young people were not being met due to completely inadequate educational facilities and resources.

Two partially funded government-assisted schools were struggling to serve the needs of expanding communities. Classes were taking place in makeshift buildings managed by entrepreneurial locals employing unqualified teachers who offered their services unpaid. There

was a notable absence of careers advice, skills-training and a functioning placement system that could improve livelihood options and upgrade capacity. This was in an environment where youth unemployment, regarded as the catalyst that would encourage disaffected youth to join rebel groups, was around 9% and was predicted to rise in the next few years. In the same district, I visited youth groups who were challenging the status quo. Their aim was to set up a vocational training centre, an independent scheme that would enable them and others to upgrade and make their skills marketable and through the process bring about change (see interview D24). My introduction to Koinange was during my first field visit when I was welcomed by members of the Soweï women's society wearing traditional costume, along with a central figure wearing traditional Soweï costume, her face hidden by a cumbersome full-head Soweï mask.²⁸ The image below, not of the actual event, shows a similar costume and traditional mask.



Muma "Unity," a mask carved in 1954 by Mustafa Ado Dassama dancing at Ngjehun, Luawa, Kailahun. Photograph by Ruth Philips.

Mende people, Southern Sierra Leone
Helmet Mask (soweï)
20th Century
Wood, fiber
Gift of Rod McGalliard
1990.14.28

Drumming and celebratory dancing accompanied the event, and after the ceremony I was guided in observing the correct protocols with chiefs and elders. I made my introductions, explaining the purpose of my visits and donating a 'token' - a sum of money - which cleared the way for me to move freely within the district. The chiefs were the gateway into the community

²⁸ The Soweï mask is used in a girl's initiation into womanhood within the Mende society. It is decorated with symbolic meanings: a high forehead for mind and knowledge, a bird on top of the head signifies women's natural intuition, scars decorating the face show her new, harder life as a woman. The blackness of the mask identifies it as a river-dwelling spirit (Vogel, 1980).

in this relatively recent settlement where observation of traditional culture and practices was central to customary practice. I visited Kaningo with assistant fieldworkers on a regular basis for the duration of three field trips lasting two months, six weeks, and three weeks respectively. My visits were facilitated by a local leader who was a long-time resident and social worker who scheduled and coordinated meetings. I notified him ahead of my arrival and he then cleared it with the relevant authority figures, groups and individuals. I became familiar with the layout of the district and the groups who lived there in main three settlements. The first was located close to the local hub of Kaningo Junction, the second was in Kamayama, a settlement within reasonable access of Regent Road, and the third was located in Marimbo Water, a far more isolated community situated on rocky hillsides below Hill Station. In each location, I first outlined the purpose of my visits, after which local people confirmed they would participate.

Next, I met with Mammy Queen, the female chief and head of the Sowe society who was responsible for conducting FGM in her community (as introduced in Chapter Two). Mammy Queen, an influential figure in the community, acted as gatekeeper to free movement and especially interaction with local women. Once more, introductions and protocols were observed prior to a meeting she organised that took place in her house and was attended by a group of approximately twenty women. Long-established traditions were upheld and expected to be observed, even in this relatively recently established community.

Group Discussion, Interview D 22 - Kaningo women's group members:

The women's group met three times each month. One member described herself as 'gifted'; she was a traditional doctor and healer. Two women were trained as TBAs - the first had a certificate after completing five years training and the second was uncertified but had four years of training. They told me that some women made an attempt to have antenatal checks, but most were home deliveries because the hospital was too far. The women worked independently without any government supplies or monitoring, and they were extremely proud of their record of very low rates of maternal mortalities and no recorded fistulas. Some of the members said the next step for them was to make contact with the new councillor who was due to be appointed and arrange a visit to the health department to raise the authorities' awareness of the general lack of provision and to demand improved services. None of the women had attended school and many had had between five and eight children. Everyone worked to earn essential survival money, and some were fortunate in having relatives who helped out when they could. One woman was supported by her son who was in the police force, and another was helped by

a brother when he had work (Group discussion facilitated by researcher, 2013).

My next meeting was with the Marimbo Water Ladies Development Group (MWLDG) who invited me to meet them in their isolated settlement set in the hills below Hill Station. After our initial meeting I met with them each week. The group made rapid progress, and after several weeks they had organised the structure of the group, identified that their priority was to construct a health clinic, secured land and were now seeking funding. Their progress and determination were remarkable.

Group Interview D23 - Marimbo Water Ladies Development Group (MWLDG):

Marimbo Water, established approximately fifteen years ago, is located high in the hills of the Lumley valley with dwellings that consist mainly of *pan-bhodies*.²⁹ The houses cling to hillsides that are prone to erosion and, therefore, to mud and stone-slides in the rains. This is in part because massive rocks and boulders are broken and removed for use as building materials. Marimbo Water is populated by a mix of locals and displaced people who arrived seeking safety during the war. Some were rebels who took refuge and stayed on; others are newer arrivals who have headed here because living costs are lower than in many districts of Freetown. The settlement was without connections to government health or education initiatives.

Members of the group were keen to work with the newly elected councillor in the hopes that he could assist them in connecting to services. I had the opportunity to schedule and chair weekly meetings, to interact with groups, and to listen, observe and learn how community business was conducted. I participated in group discussions, conducted one-to-one conversations which meant I developed a familiarity with the community and its inhabitants, and was able to establish trust and form relationships which was invaluable to this study. During my last four-week field trip, the group managed to secure land, formed the Marimbo Water Ladies Developmental Organisation (MWLDO), registered its constitution and were in the process of moving ahead to commence fund-raising for the project. MWLDO soon transformed into a dynamic and cohesive women's group with roles and tasks clearly allocated and a strong core of key activists who worked together to establish a solid structure. In the space of a few weeks the women identified group members who would agree to act as chairperson, treasurer, secretary, and coordinator. They also recruited the support of community leaders and chiefs in order to acquire land and to organise the legal framework for the constitution as is required to run a project and to set up a local healthcare centre. As a secondary project. the MWLDO was

²⁹ Pan-bhodies are simple dwellings constructed out of available materials that may include scrap metal, corrugated iron, wattle (plastered over with clay), palm leaves, long grass etc.

formulating plans to set up a micro-enterprise gara-dyeing scheme. This determined group demonstrated the significant results that could be achieved in a short time when women organized themselves and worked together.

Several women in the group were ‘stone-breakers’, a job that involved them breaking chunks of stone from the hillside with a pick, which they then pulverised into smaller pieces with hammers. Other women then worked with the smaller pieces smashing them into reduced fragments. Women complained that they received only a small sum for each load, and that they were often short-changed on the weight and were frequently paid in arrears. One woman laboured for a contractor and was paid to fetch water; another was a charcoal seller; another a street trader; there was also a weaver, a hairdresser, a caterer and a palm wine (*poyo*) seller in the group. The majority of the women bore responsibility for providing for themselves and their families. They functioned at basic survival levels, unsupported by government initiatives, and they were not linked to government health or education schemes.

Members of the MWLDO struggled to improve their socio-economic situation, but women in the group demonstrated remarkable resilience and resourcefulness given that most had no formal education or training. Several were without husbands. Some husbands or partners had died, and others had left. One woman commented that, “Men impregnate women then leave.” The meetings revealed the women’s strength, resilience and determination to survive in the face of their precarious socio-economic position from which they had no respite, even in the event of emergencies such as health issues, family problems and seasonal variations in earnings (Group discussion facilitated by researcher, 2013).

I now turn to the subject of education, which I identified in Chapter Four as the catalyst that would lead to women’s empowerment and gender equality. I present data collected during visits to schools in Kaningo where head teachers and staff discussed the basic levels of education they were striving to deliver in the community and doing so without input from the GoSL or INGOs. Comments made in conversations resonated with the statements made by officials (see Chapter Five), indicating inaction and a lack of commitment by government bureaucrats to resolve failings in the education system and to improve programme outcomes. Most Kaningo-based families I was in contact with were looking to the long term and were aware that education was crucial if their children were to make progress, but many were dependent on their children working, which denied them the opportunity of education.

In lieu of adequate provision of government-assisted schools some local groups contributed their skills and labour and donated money to pay for materials, the costs of construction of school buildings and to support teachers, providing a modest stipend for teaching staff. I visited several schools and spoke to staff and students to gain an insight into the education that was available to them, which received little or (more often) no government funding. Local people set up parallel systems that were de-linked from government interventions but these innovative moves, I propose, also served to release the government from its responsibility towards the inhabitants. People were dismissive of the government, they had no confidence in its ability to deliver so they bypassed the GoSL, taking responsibility for delivery of basic services. Some schools, such as the Ivor Leigh Memorial School, were heavily dependent on funding through diaspora networks that involved family outside the country who set up fundraising projects on their behalf.

Supporting proposals made in Chapter Four - that structures and syllabus contents in Sierra Leone need to be revised and restructured - teachers I interviewed told me the curriculum ought to be gender-sensitive, which is in line with the assertion of Stromquist (2002). But I was also told that training did not cover such topics, which undermined the position of teachers when called upon to confront issues of gender inequality that arose in the classroom. Stromquist (2002) argues that it is essential to work with specially designed and context-appropriate syllabi to foster sensitivity towards gender issues.

The schools I visited did not receive government funding for any initiatives that were specifically designed to be supportive of girls in spite of claims by the GoSL that it gave its full backing to girl's education. In one example, the head teacher and school management teams of a government-assisted school described a complicated and extremely lengthy procedure that was required to secure government-assisted status. The level of financial contribution that would be provided would be determined if and when certain criteria were met, but it was suggested that it was a marginal amount of total costs. This also applied to the Ivor Leigh Memorial School which I presented as a case study (see Chapter Four). It is one of several schools that tried to provide free education but was forced to introduce fees to cover basic overheads and to pay teacher salaries. The interviewees in the following section articulated some of the difficulties they encountered when they embarked on action to 'do it for themselves' (as was proposed by the senior administrator of MMCET in interview E34) in the community where they lived. The group was determined to set up facilities they needed to advance their career and work prospects (Researcher interviews, 2013)

Group interview D24 - Members of The Bench of Hope, Kaningo:

During field visits to Kaningo I met with 'The Bench of Hope', a young men's group based in Kaningo whose members ranged from 16-27 years old. They spoke openly of how they valued education far more highly than their parents' generation, most of whom were illiterate and did not understand the importance of schooling. They felt repressed by culture and tradition. Members of The Bench of Hope described how they had come together three years earlier to create unity among youth, and their intention was to empower young men, gain skills and to go through training that would lead to employment. Members of the group contributed Le 5,000 twice a month, which went towards football training and equipment so that their local team could compete in district leagues. Bench of Hope members were frustrated by the patriarchal dominance of elders and chiefs, the landowners who, they said, regarded them as 'children' incapable of taking responsibility until they 'matured', which could be postponed until they were in their mid-to-late thirties. I attended a meeting with them concerning plans for land that had been donated by a local chief and landowner for construction of a vocational training centre. Fundraising was planned to start immediately, the aim of which was to raise the required funding to construct and operate a skills-training centre where they would run courses that provided young men with the certificates they required to get work as carpenters, masons, engineers, and cycle and auto mechanics. Certification was obligatory, irrespective of experience, which raised issues as it was costly. Group members said without formal qualifications they were exploited as cheap day-labour. They were keen to find out about scholarships and to learn more about university entrance.

They described challenges they had faced at each stage of the project to construct the skills training centre. The plans had to be approved and were closely monitored by chiefs who had the power to decide whether the young men were capable of project management and administration. It was becoming clear that, girls and women were suppressed by culture and tradition dominated by patriarchy, but the same also applied to young men who found it extremely challenging to maintain momentum and achieve results while they remained repressed by traditional leaders: chiefs and elders (Group discussion facilitated by researcher , 2013).

Group interview D25 - Members of The Young Ladies of Kaningo:

I met with the 'Young Ladies of Kaningo' women's group accompanied by an assistant researcher, a newly appointed local councillor, and members of the group who participated in the previous interview. The gathering was composed of approximately fifty people, including young women, schoolgirls, young men and boys. One nineteen-year-old woman had a small child and had recently returned to school; she hoped to complete her education by the time she was twenty. Her ambition was to go to university, she wanted to become a lawyer but did not have access to careers advice and had no idea of the necessary study route or awareness of costs and practicalities involved. The group included a qualified caterer and nutritionist, petty traders, the owner of a small and a rice cook. Another participant was a hairdresser who was recently widowed and was seeking a scholarship for her eleven-year-old child to continue her education. Mother and daughter were both living with another sister who had left her abusive husband the previous week. The sisters, along with their children, planned to go and live with their father who was based outside Freetown. Other young members of the group also described their aspirations, which included entering catering, journalism, teaching and training or becoming an 'air hostess'.

Members of the young women's group were focused, ambitious and dynamic, determined to create independent lives for themselves, and to move away from a traditional way of life. I observed that by comparison, the boys, although determined to progress, appeared more cautious and less adventurous. Both groups acknowledged that they needed further education and training to raise their skill levels that would open up livelihood opportunities. There was discussion regarding whether young men and young women could share the vocational training centre. Interestingly, neither group was sure this could work as tradition dictated that they function separately. This was in contrast to mixed groups who attended MMCDT.

Towards the end of the meeting a concerned elderly male resident stood up and demanded that the councillor persuade the local authority to provide streetlights to reduce levels of violence and harassment against women and girls after dark. He recounted incidences of rape. His intervention in the meeting drew attention to the prevalence and normality of GBV and SBV in these communities. A female resident of around twenty then recounted her experience of sexual assault which she indicated was not an isolated incident. Another resident demanded that a police presence was required, suggesting that a local police base should be set up to monitor and discourage VAWG. This meeting (and other similar meetings) increased my familiarity with local culture, tradition, the socio-economic circumstances and challenges faced by women

in the community and among local groups and individuals (Group discussion observed by researcher, 2013).

Group interview D26 - Ivor Leigh Memorial School:

On several occasions I met with an enthusiastic group of girls who attended the Ivor Leigh Memorial School (ILMS) (see Chapter Four), their ages ranged from 16-19 years. The students aspired to enter professions such as accountancy, law, journalism or politics, which all subjects unsupported by the curriculum. Access to careers advice was unavailable and there was a dearth of information on progression routes. There was no system of or internships or work placements and no guidance on relevance of exams to the courses students wished to pursue in further or higher education. The girls were opposed to early marriage and they sympathised with friends who had been forced to drop out of school when they became pregnant. They spoke of rejecting traditions and were in favour of pursuing professional careers. Tragically, this was unlikely to happen unless facilities were made available to enable them to access the materials and guidance necessary to pursue their chosen career paths and to secure sources of financial provision.

One young woman I met in Kaningo had left school to have her baby when she became pregnant at the age of seventeen. She then returned to education and continued her studies in her early twenties which was not uncommon. She was determined to train as a journalist, but, without the requisite support and guidance she needed, she stood little chance of achieving her goal. At the time of my visits, ILMS was seeking government assistance to cover overheads and to pay teacher's salaries, a process that the school had commenced three years previously. Education was free when the school first opened but later it was forced to introduce fees to cover salary costs and overheads. I found similar situations in other schools which meant that even basic education was out of reach for the poorest families. Interactions revealed that student's aspirations shaped their outlook and that access to even rudimentary levels of education encouraged them to challenge traditions and cultural practices and seek independent lives that were key to their empowerment and equality (Group discussion facilitated by researcher, 2013) The following are extracts from interviews in which interviewees highlight aspects of their lives that indicate their socio-economic circumstances. Diverse comments made by participants add to the overall picture of life in the communities. Interview E27 is with a local young female student.

Interview E27 - Student, aged 16 years:

I recently lost my father. I am sixteen years old. I like the community where I live in Kaningo. I leave home at 6am and I walk to Lumley and then on to Congo Cross which takes about two and a half hours. I arrive at school by 8.30am. My fares are LE 1,000 each way, which means I don't have any money left for lunch. Sometimes I'm really hungry and occasionally I fall asleep during lessons. My ambition is to study commercial subjects at college. I really hope my family can support me. I find this school less overcrowded and better organised than my previous schools which were nearer to home.

(Researcher interview, 2013)

Irrespective of the challenges she faced, this student was determined to continue with studies that would enable her to progress towards a career. Attitudes towards girl's education were variable but (as was recorded in subsequent interviews) regard for education within families, especially of girls, was directly linked to degrees of poverty endured by each specific family. Hidden costs attached to government 'free schooling' were a strong deterrent. Extremes of poverty perpetuated a culture in which children working to contribute to the family income was condoned, which contributed to diminishing regard for education as a route of progression.

Interview E27 - Kaningo resident since 1972:

The interviewee's brief comments reference commonly held views on girls' education that were prevalent when she was of school age. She commented with irony on how this affected her marriage and noted that change was beginning to take place as families began to acquire financial stability. She offered the following view:

My aunt didn't believe girls should be educated so I didn't go to school. I had five children and was driven from my home by my husband because I was illiterate. We need skills centres, local people need improved job opportunities. Youths in Kaningo struggle. They need a lot of support, if they get any work, it's often only as day labourers. Prostitution is a significant issue in Kaningo.

(Researcher interview, 2013)

Interview E28 - Kaningo councillor:

The councillor listed numerous community and infrastructure projects she had proposed and letters she had written in the last two years. She claimed that she frequently received no response from requests for government support, she said schemes were often stalled. She had submitted proposals for construction of roads, bridges, a dam, a health centre, a public pump, cemeteries, provision of electricity supplies, agricultural tools and seedlings for backyard gardens, as well as "tools and food for work" initiatives through which tools or food were given

in exchange for work instead of wages. Wages, she stated were what people needed to support school fees.

The way forward is to organise and mobilise community women and through advocacy and lobbying it will be possible to achieve implementation of projects [...]

Joblessness is perpetuated by a lack of education and low levels of literacy. Attendance on skills-training schemes is poor, with young people demanding payment to attend. Frustrations can easily erupt into violent behaviour. I know many ex-combatants living in the community who need counselling.

(Researcher interview, 2013)

The councillor had concerns as to how such schemes were administered. In her opinion there was over reliance on community leaders who she believed monopolised resources. She claimed there was a lack of cohesion at a local level that interfered with decisions being reached that were of benefit to the community, and blamed political leaders at council and central levels for the failure of development projects. But it is also important to note that, as councillor, claims had also been made that project funding *she* had received was unaccounted for. One local resident claimed that money allocated to local infrastructure projects such as roadbuilding “had been eaten” ³⁰ (Researcher interview, 2013).

5.3 Schools in Kaningo

In Interviews E29, E30 and E31 participants, school proprietors, head-teachers, staff and students discussed some of the main challenges they face. The first is with a head teacher of a government-assisted school. On this occasion, one of my research assistants fell asleep during my conversation with the school head and had to be prompted to wake up and record an account of the meeting. He was from a relatively wealthy background, his family owned a business in Freetown, but he didn’t participate as the other researchers did or comprehend the value of fieldwork, he failed to write up the project and left midway through the project. The remaining three members of the group requested travel allowances as they could not afford to pay for transport across the city, which took a minimum of an hour and a half and could be unpredictable due to erratic connections from East to West Freetown. The remaining three students completed the project and said they learned a lot from participating in the exercise and benefited from the exposure. I in turn benefited from their local knowledge, which was invaluable to my research. In the following interview, the head-teacher describes the issues her school had to contend with.

³⁰ Money “that had been eaten” was an expression often used when referring to misappropriation of funding.

Interview E29 - Head-teacher, Government-assisted School Kaningo:

We are one of Kaningo's two government-assisted schools. We opened the primary school in 2003 in direct response to the lack of educational facilities for local children. In 2007, after lengthy negotiations, the school achieved government-assisted status, which agreed payment of qualified teachers' salaries but not of unqualified teachers required to support pupil numbers we pay with revenue generated through the levy of school fees.

We expanded in September 2011 when the secondary school was opened which comprises six classrooms with additional outside recreational space. Total enrolment at the two schools is 480 students. Now our sights are set on expansion of the school to include development of a vocational training centre in premises adjoining the new school building. I work closely with the Community Teacher's Association. I have not had support from my local councillor.

(Researcher interview, 2013)

As the interviewee pointed out, government assistance did not cover teachers' monthly salaries; she told me that they were paid out of her husband's income. In addition he gave his professional services (he was a qualified accountant) to the school free of charge in order to reduce outlays. The head-teacher relied on her husband's contacts at a teacher-training college in Makeni where she sent unqualified teachers to be trained funded again from her husband's salary. She was forced to charge fees to help fund the general running costs of the school (Researcher interview, 2013).

This interview shows the extent to which this local couple were devoted to the support of their community. The head and her husband were nearing completion of their next project which was the construction of a secondary and sixth form college they were about to open. They had further plans to set up a vocational and adult training centre. Their overall objective was to provide comprehensive education for neighbourhood families and their children.

Interview E30 - Teacher, Kakua International School, Kaningo:

The teacher spoke proudly of the ethos of the school, he told me how overstretched members of staff were and he outlined the teaching that was taking place in the institution, which had submitted an application for government assistance. He told me that to support himself, his wife and three children he survived on a small stipend (not sufficient to buy a bag of rice) and on the generosity of some parents. He described the role of Kakua International School (which is linked with Kakua School Bo):

We are heavily involved in community outreach work with families to convince them of the merits of education. We have set up a parent-teachers association to create stronger links with community families. Many parents are petty traders, they believe education interferes with a child's ability to work and earn money to help support the family.

[...]

Most of our teachers have years of practical experience working with children and adults in education but don't have formal qualifications due to disruption of their schooling during the war. We are dependent on a stipend and the beneficence of parents. I love my work. I am a founder of the school,

[...]

The proprietor and a team of ten teachers are applying for government assistance, which if granted will entitle students to take public exams but it won't guarantee that teachers receive salaries. The school runs a shift system which is essential to cope with the large numbers of students in schools. The premises of this school were very basic. Two classes shared cramped humid space in a makeshift building, partitioned by sacking. The floor was mud and rubble. Water dripped from the ceiling and pupils were visibly suffering in the damp atmosphere.



Image 5. (left, exterior) and Image 6. (right, interior): Kakua Secondary School. Kaningo, Sierra Leone [authorised by teacher]. (Sandra Wolton, 2013)

Teachers raised concerns regarding the content of the curriculum they were obliged to follow, they commented that the it was inappropriate, and in their opinion the syllabus did not equip students with the necessary skills to provide them with a sustainable livelihood. This reflects the observations of Denov and Maclure:

Among challenges that face countries such as Sierra Leone in post-conflict reconstruction, [...] it is far from evident that the goal of gender equity features as central to educational reconstruction [...] which involves reforms in curricula and pedagogy.

(Denov & Maclure, 2009, p. 613)

Most classes had to cater for a wide age range of students including some in their twenties who need to “catch up” having missed out on education due to the conflict. For example, one class had students ranging from 16 to 26. The school operated syndicate classes (private tuition classes) before and after school in order to bring in extra money. Fees were charged to cover overheads, salaries and the cost of uniforms, and there were plans to introduce adult literacy programmes in a bid to reduce marginalisation.

Staff and students were enthusiastic in spite of functioning under extremely difficult conditions. Those I spoke with said they were focused on getting students through national examinations so that they could progress into government-assisted institutions and continue their education. The next interview describes a primary school located in another makeshift building where most of the teaching staff were unqualified and dependent on donations from families whose children attended the King of Kings School.

Interview E31 - Head-teacher, King of Kings School, Kaningo:

The school building, which was owned by a woman who lived abroad, was located in a concrete shell of a partially constructed house and had opened in 2008. The owner gave her consent for the premises to be used as a school for underprivileged children. Some of the children worked as hawkers and others did cleaning and simple domestic work. Some activities carried out by the children can be considered child labour.³¹

I was introduced to the head teacher and members of his staff who were mostly unqualified local people who survived on a stipend provided by parents. They told me they wanted to make sure children were given an education. The head teacher continued:

We have 200 pupils and eight unqualified teachers who work on a voluntary basis. Initially the education was free, now fees of Le 10,000 per term have been introduced to cover costs and to pay teachers a stipend. In 2010-2011 16 pupils passed the National Primary Selective Examination qualifying them to enter secondary school. The school is going through the process of registration and applying to the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) for support. Many families survive on a meagre income from stone-breaking and fetching water and are not convinced of the value of education. We find it challenges our resources to monitor student enrolment, retention and completion.

(Researcher interview, 2013)

³¹ This refers to, work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, is harmful to their physical and mental development, work that interferes with or deprives them of schooling. In Sierra Leone, for example, children are involved in diamond mining, commercial sexual exploitation, human trafficking, dangerous tasks in agriculture to name but a few forms of child labour (ILAB, 2018).

The community schools were not funded by government but were instead established in response to local needs. The school referred to in interview E29 was ‘government-assisted’ in that it received a small sum towards costs of overheads and salaries, but those discussed in interviews E30 and E31 were ‘non-government-assisted’. These institutions were heavily criticised by a former MP and a senior official in the department of Basic Education (see Chapter Five) and the head of Community Studies at MMCET (see Chapter Six, Interview E34). There were concerns about maintaining acceptable standards in the schools that faced difficulties in recruiting fully qualified teachers. Critics claimed that parents paid for education that they could barely afford and that it would not necessarily equip children with the knowledge and skills they needed to progress to further studies and to enter the workplace. The establishments were examples of local initiatives that functioned outside the official system, forming a parallel structure that was de-linked from government.

Interviews with senior officials in relevant departments revealed that some were extremely critical of these community-run schools. In one interview, for example, an official said he regarded them as “solely money-making enterprises set up by opportunists who profited from the charges they levied.” He (correctly) commented that community schools were usually located in sub-standard buildings with unqualified staff (as was also stated by the participant in Interview C13), and he claimed that such ventures undermined the position of the Ministry of Education (MoE). Similar sentiments were expressed by senior members of 50/50 (see Chapter Five, Interview C16), who saw little value in education carried out in leaky, sub-standard buildings with poor teaching quality and curriculum content. A senior official attached to the MoE’s Basic Education Unit was critical of community-driven projects and believed it was preferable to provide the basics for a small number of ‘reputable’ or ‘good-quality’ schools. But this revealed fundamental discrepancies between government rhetoric and the funding available to deliver ‘quality’ education that satisfied immediate community needs.

The same official said that training schemes, supported by the Ministry of Basic Education (a separate unit attached to the Department of Education), were available so that teachers could gain professional qualifications. He admitted, however, that he had never been to Kaningo, he did not know where it was, and had no knowledge of local educational provision; he appeared to be out-of-touch with the state of educational provision. Similarly, the criticisms of community schools made by members of 50/50 were not based on knowledge of the existing options for children in the communities, and the interviewees gave no indication of a willingness to work towards filling an obvious resourcing gap.

Both the MoE official and the teaching staff at schools I visited acknowledged that education was compulsory: all children were required to complete six years of primary education and three years of secondary education. Given this legal requirement, the lack of commitment towards implementing better quality education was striking. Poverty and family dependency on children's incomes proved to be strong barriers to children's education, and the situation was exacerbated by an absence of effective political intervention. These observations expose the degree to which the political elite are detached from any real commitment to address issues affecting disadvantaged and extremely poor families. Gaps in provision were then filled by local people who had the means, resources, and professional expertise, and who sometimes had access to diaspora networks who helped to fund and support community schools.

6.3 Health, Wellbeing & Gender in Kaningo

Interview E32 - Proprietor of Paycy's Private Clinic, Kaningo:

In Kaningo, healthcare facilities were provided by Paycy's, a private clinic opened in 2010 to provide basic medical community services in lieu of government implementation of the Free Healthcare Initiative (FHCI, 2010). The project was set up by a medical accountant whose family owned the land and who gave his professional services free of charge and his wife who was a qualified nurse. Basic medical care was free, other than to patients who could afford to pay a small sum to cover overheads. Prior to the opening of Paycy's, residents had to travel outside of the district to access healthcare at Lumley hospital (see Interview D28), which meant going via steep footpaths or on dirt roads. Vehicular access was restricted to roads bordering either side of Kaningo.

The clinic was an example of a local initiative set up to provide basic community services in Kaningo, which provided general medical and surgical facilities, obstetrics, immunisation, essential drugs, antenatal and under-five healthcare. At the time of my second visit, Paycy's had become officially registered and was receiving money towards the cost of medicines which the couple had previously bought with their salaries. By this time, there was a small delivery room and as I arrived a new-born baby was thrust into my arms by the proud mother. Charges were made for delivery of babies and ante and post-natal care for mother and baby. The alternative option for medical care was Lumley Government Hospital located outside the district in a building originally constructed by Médecins Sans Frontières. The government hospital struggled to provide rudimentary medical services and basic medical facilities for local people, and was in a state of extreme disrepair as I describe below (Researcher interview, 2013).

Interview E33 - Matron at Lumley Government Hospital:

I spoke with the person in charge, the matron, who was attempting to impose a structure. She told me the staff were unpaid and working on a voluntary basis, caring for patients as best they could with the few available resources. My research assistant and I followed the councillor (see Interview D24) who was taking us on a tour of the hospital into an L-shaped single-storey building with dirty curtains, haphazardly tied either half in or half out of grimy windows. It was the only hospital within striking distance of Kaningo. We encountered a huddle of women who were gathered around a sad-looking young woman clutching a small, listless baby girl. The matron lifted the child into her arms and demonstrated she was anaemic and needed a blood transfusion. She displayed the pale-yellow soles of the child's feet and the palms of her tiny hands. Another woman had a fistful of notes. Money was being collected; a whip round to buy blood for the baby. Mother and baby, I was told, had been sleeping rough and the young woman did not know who the father was, and sympathy appeared to be thin on the ground.

We went into the building. The floors and walls of the interior were filthy and stained with medical and human waste. Rooms were located on either side of a long, unlit internal corridor. The hospital had been battered by time and neglect; it was somewhere to squat temporarily until a clean and clinical alternative was provided - only there were no apparent plans for this.

The long abandoned 'dispensary' was a derelict, dark, grubby cupboard with a dusty counter. A few bottles of medication were dumped on a filthy ledge and appeared to be the only available medical supplies; there was no evidence of other stocks of medicines. We passed the disused operating theatre, the doors nailed shut with several wooden struts. It resembled a prison more than a place to heal the sick and wounded. The wards were dark and gloomy with a disorganised scattering of people, most attached to drips, lying on stained mattresses. The patients were mainly female with babies lying alongside them, and they too had drips and sachets of blood attached to their tiny forms. The staff appeared completely demoralised, grappling as best they could with their task of caring for the sick in this challenging environment (Researcher interview, 2013).

During weekly visits to Kaningo (covering a period of six weeks) I learned of another local healthcare option available to local women from one of the local women. Though I was not able to schedule a visit. High in the hills, a Scandinavian nurse had turned her home into a maternity facility for women who could not travel far and who were in desperate need of care closer to the community where they lived. I was told that there were no charges for the services. It was evident that Kaningo did not have adequate healthcare facilities capable of responding to the

medical needs of local populations, which was reconfirmed at the time of the EVD outbreak. During each of my field visits between 2011 and 2014 I saw no evidence of NGOs based in the district or of any organisation providing support for local people.

The next interview is from a meeting with a senior administrator from Milton Margai College for Education and Technology who lived in Kaningo. He accompanied me on a day's field visit to the district in his capacity as a community development worker, together we visited several community schools.

Interview E34 - Senior Administrator, MMCET

The senior administrator for community development at Milton Margai College for Education and Technology (MMCET), a respected Sierra Leonean institution, summarised the actions he believed were necessary in order to advance community development. He was less specific regarding the practicalities of how these measures could be realised. He outlined the principal tasks of his department: training of social workers, empowerment of women and support for the poor and disadvantaged. He aligned his vision of community development at a local level with government policy of decentralisation. He believed it was down to the community to take responsibility for the establishment and organisation of groups who would work together to advance community development. He said that while his institute produced many graduates of community development each year, they still found it hard to get work. There was a need for improved careers advice (which MMCET has since begun to offer) and the administrator suggested that links should be strengthened between MMCET, industry and the workplace. Internments did take place during courses, and graduates could continue training and gaining experience through a structure of placements with INGOs and in government departments His belief regarding community development was that communities "had to do it for themselves [...] they couldn't wait for others to do it for them" (Researcher interview, 2013).

In Interview E35, I also spoke to a professional female resident who had constructed a house in Kaningo from money she received when she divorced her husband. She highlighted divisions in communities and weaknesses in family structures. She suggested that women's groups could play a key role in raising community awareness of the need for change that would result in broader options for girls and lead ultimately to women's empowerment.

Interview E35 - Resident, Kaningo:

The community will develop when women are empowered. Developing the capacity of women in Kaningo will take the community to another level. The Bondo Society only teaches girls how to behave with elders and other formal cultural guidelines. Meanwhile there is a huge problem of teenage pregnancy and of unsafe abortions. It needs women's groups to go out and give the information. The rich are not connected with the community, they do not have any contact with the poor and they don't use local services.

[...]

It's a young community with lots of problems. There are many hardship issues.

[...]

Parents don't have time for their children, they don't understand the value of education. Some parents even go as far as actively encouraging their daughters to go into prostitution to provide money. Kaningo has an 80% rate of teenage pregnancies. Some girls go back to school but there are huge amounts of stigma. NGOs are beginning to work with the Ministry of Gender to create boarding schools and shelters for girls to encourage them to finish their education. There is a Marie Stopes clinic at Malama which aims for four years prevention of pregnancy to encourage girls to finish school. A local NGO and charity is working with teachers, training them in how to impart this information which can be fairly sensitive. We hope to open a vocational centre.

(Researcher interview, 2013)

The last section of this interview strikes a positive note as it identifies services that have been introduced to deal with community issues.

6.4 Summary of Issues in Kaningo

In conversation with officials who were responsible for education as well as interaction with several groups of students and assistant fieldworkers, I learned that schools and staff did not have the resources to prepare students for further or higher education or for vocational training. There was no system in place to give students guidance in the preparation of CVs, writing personal statements, or applying for scholarships, training or jobs. There were also no schemes or links with industry to provide work experience, apart from a structure that MMCET planned to introduce. Students therefore began their adult lives with a low skills base, which threatened the success of their transition from education to the workplace and limited their potential to progress towards a range of livelihood options and careers. They were completely unaware of how to present themselves at interview or the demands the work environment.

As noted earlier, Kaningo was badly served by road and bridge infrastructure. On one occasion, children's access to school was cut-off when a bridge was washed away in the rains. It was replaced through an initiative set up by members of a local women's group who each contributed Le 1,000 towards reconstruction. They used the money to buy the cement and iron rods required to support the structure. Two weeks into the project, eighteen bags of cement had been provided and more were due to arrive. Along with the women's groups, several other interviewees were critical of the move to decentralisation of council-run affairs. I was told by participants both in Kaningo and Kamaranka that decentralisation had exacerbated poor communication between central government and local council forums, which meant that funding allocated to local projects had been misappropriated and was unaccounted for.

When I asked where the funds had gone for projects like road construction in Kaningo, I was told the money 'had been eaten'³², a phrase often used following the non-implementation of local projects. Contact between local councillors and MPs was irregular, and the councillors spoke of being intimidated by the prospect of challenging 'honourables', but the situation granted them more autonomy within the community. When asked about support for Kaningo, one senior government official (in Interview B9) had said:

There is a huge problem in terms of prioritisation of resources with central Freetown being favoured. The government never imagined that settlements would spring up on the current scale. There has been very little government planning and provision of social and educational amenities.

(Researcher interview, 2013)

Senior officials supported decentralisation in principle, but in Kaningo and in rural districts in Kamaranka my observation was that the move had actually rendered MPs - the 'honourables' - and councillors less accountable. The result was that it sanctioned poor implementation of social and education programmes. One bureaucrat suggested that decentralisation vested chiefs with more power, thereby strengthening patriarchy.

In Kaningo (and as I later observed in rural districts), levels of development (or lack of development) were directly linked to poverty and proximity to infrastructure, however basic. For example, Kaningo Junction, established earlier than more recent phases of development in Kaningo, was a compact settlement comprised of several rows of small brick-built houses accompanied by shops and shacks that sold household items and food. It lay along a dirt road

³² Greed is called 'eating', a term I heard used on several occasions, it is the habit of hoarding rather than sharing resources. 'Eating' inspires fear and anger in those affected as their very survival may be threatened by it (Bolten, 2012, p. 3).

accessible most easily by 4x4 vehicles. This road connected to a tarmac road that ran along the Eastern rim of the valley. In this hamlet-like settlement, women went about their daily duties, washing, cleaning and cooking. Marimbo Water, by comparison, was isolated; set high in rocky outcrops that were prone to erosion. The dwellings were basic with evidence of extreme levels of poverty and disadvantage, which the tight-knit women's group was working extremely hard to alleviate.

6.5 Trauma & Violence Against Women in Makeni

I first travelled to Makeni, in the northern province of Bombali by shared taxi in 2012. It was a cheap if somewhat terrifying mode of transport. Passengers and luggage were crammed into and on top of the vehicle and when it was overflowing with both, it departed from East Freetown. From there it sped along the main (and only) road, which had no speed restrictions. Travelling north from Makeni on later visits I hired a 4x4 vehicle, the only transport that could cope with the severely potholed laterite clay roads in outlying districts. Vehicle hire, drivers and fuel were expensive, making it a costly exercise, but it was the only way to reach rural districts other than by motor bike, which I felt was too dangerous. I employed an experienced driver and a research assistant who acted as guide and interpreter. The modest amounts I paid allowed them to support themselves and family members. As a self-funding researcher, I was constrained by limited resources which I had to stretch to their limit to pay for the trips.

During these field trips I liaised with a community worker who scheduled and coordinated visits to urban and rural communities in accordance with my brief, which was to assess and compare different settlements in order to provide give a balanced set of data. I had met some of the participants independently on my initial visit in 2011, and I was introduced to others on subsequent visits. We stopped in Makeni, the capital of the northern province of Bombali, which had been heavily occupied by rebel groups for significant periods during the war. Makeni continues to live with the repercussions of the conflict and occupation, and the population has yet to process the trauma suffered during the conflict³³ (Bolten, 2012). According to Shaw (2002), when such ordeals re-surface, the traumatised person can become capable of further acts of extreme violence. I heard several accounts of violence against women and also witnessed the results of a violent act against a woman during my stay, all of which pointed towards a high prevalence and normalisation of violence.

³³ Bolten (2012) details the period of occupation through the narratives of nine local residents.

Interview E36 - Salon owner and trainee hairdressers, Makeni:

On my first visit to Makeni I met the owner of a hairdressing salon who operated a two-year hairdressing training scheme for former sex workers. Originally, an NGO offered support for a project if the owner gathered together a group of girls who were living on the streets. As requested, the group was formed but no help was forthcoming; that was two to three years ago. All the salon received was half a bag of rice from time to time.

The 'girls'³⁴ were from poor families and from remote villages, and many had been displaced or orphaned. They had survived the war, but poverty forced them to work on the streets. They sent their earnings home to support relatives and extended family. The girls would graduate at the end of the first year, and in the second year they are trained in manicures and pedicures. A diploma was awarded on completion of the two years of training. They worked Monday through to Saturday, and on Sundays they went to church. Customers paid a small amount, which the girls used to buy food. There was an annual graduation day which created great excitement and took place in Freetown, following which some of the girls continued to work in the salon. The salon also organised sports days.

The owner started the group with twenty-five girls, but ten dropped out and went back on the streets. At the time of my visit, a new-born baby was asleep on the floor in a corner of the salon, while four other small children were running around. One girl with a little baby said she had lived on the streets for four years. The salon had received little funding or support for the last eight months, though there was mention of a town councillor who was trying to help, and also of some back-up from social welfare, and an INGO and a government ministry reportedly provided a small amount of assistance.

6.6 Hidden Violence against Women in Makeni:

I returned to the salon fifteen months later when I was warmly welcomed by some of the same girls whose ages ranged from seventeen to around twenty-four. Fifteen trainees were working in the salon, and among the group there were eight children. The owner told the story of delivering one of the babies on her bedroom floor because there was no money for the girl to go to hospital. She ran to the salon, got some scissors, took them home, boiled them to sterilise them and prayed to God that everything would be all right. Fortunately, it was. Out of eight

³⁴ I use the term 'girls' here (rather than 'young women' as I do elsewhere when referring to over twenty-years-old) as it is a term often used in relation to prostitutes. The trainee hairdressers in the salon ranged from 17-25 years old.

girls interviewed only one could read and write. None of the girls had been to school, and so writing down their names took some time. Responses to my suggestion that the literate trainee could run literacy classes for her fellow students to improve their skills and job opportunities were mixed: the trainees had far more pressing priorities. I spent some time with the group, and I learnt of the harsh reality of their lives. They continued to work as prostitutes, resorting to sex as an occupation for survival as they did not have sufficient money for basic needs. They ate once a day in the evening, and when I offered the girls lunch, the owner's response was that no one ever ate lunch; a little later, with some persuasion, everyone dived into a modestly priced but hearty lunch. The girls 'worked' a couple of night clubs after they finished their day in the salon. If they were lucky, they would earn between Le 10,000 and Le 5,000 per client. Often, after they 'delivered the goods', an argument about payment would ensue, following which they were frequently beaten and not paid. Several girls showed me scars on their legs and torsos.

The system that was in operation, in which girls generally worked through a 'chairlady' who had a room of her own, was described to me by the leader of CADEPS (Interview C16). The chairlady had priority and the girls paid to use the space to service clients when it was free. Girls were auctioned to the highest bidder and there could be three in the room at a time. Sometimes girls chose to pay a client for a place to sleep, otherwise they would have to catch up on sleep during the day. I was told stories of transactions and sex taking place in derelict or half-constructed buildings or in back streets where it was completely unsafe for the girls; they even slept there. When night work was finished, they went straight to the salon to get some rest. Most of the girls were from extremely poor families in faraway villages. They described their 'work' as 'striving' for their parents. One trainee lived with a friend, and four girls boarded with the owner. Others slept on the salon floor or occasionally on the streets, and some then ended up returning to a life lived completely on the streets.

Among the group of fifteen girls, one was heavily pregnant and there were eight babies plus several small children. I discussed the importance of the girls insisting on the use of condoms which they said they did, but they evidently did not practise safe sex and were extremely vulnerable to the risks of contracting HIV/AIDS and other infections. I was told by the community worker/guide that he intended to apply for funding for a project to rehabilitate and retrain former sex workers. Makeni had a disproportionately large influx of displaced people, most of whom had survived the conflict but had lost their livelihoods and homes in rural districts during the war, they then headed for the city in the hopes of securing waged

employment (Bolten, 2012). On my third visit to the salon, circumstances had deteriorated due to lack of funding and support. I concluded that it was very likely that the salon doubled as a brothel (I already knew it was transformed into a bar in the evening), and that the owner was a business woman who recruited and supplied girls to the 'trade', which was thriving due to a construction boom in Makeni that had fuelled the arrival of large numbers of migrant workers. Detailed research would be required to determine the true story, as I do not have substantive evidence to prove that this was indeed the case.

My final visit to Makeni was coloured by my stay with the director of an international charity. As I was leaving, the director's wife came to me extremely distressed and pulling her dress down, showed me bloody welts and bruising on her back from a beating her husband had given her the day before. I calmed her and asked what action she had taken. She had told close female friends, she had been counselled by her pastor, and she had visited her doctor who confirmed she had not suffered any broken bones. I left deeply concerned, unsure of what action I should take. I returned to Freetown and explained the situation to the director of an international gender programme and the assistant country director of a UN agency that supported women. "Will she take her husband to court?" they asked. "No," I replied. "Will she leave her husband?" "No." "Is she financially independent?" "No." "Then there is nothing that can be done." That is how each conversation ended. I suggested the director should be warned by a superior that his behaviour risked his position, but this proposal was met with indifference. A male community worker who was listening commented "Women like that usually ask for it!".

As the data presented above indicated, women continued not only to be exploited and abused by men but, as was the case in practices of the Sowei and Bondo secret societies (notably around FGM, as discussed in Chapter Three), exploitation and abuse was also perpetrated by women against other women.

6.7 Rural Lives of Women in Kamaranka

On two occasions I travelled from Makeni to the northern region of Sierra Leone, where I carried out mapping exercises in villages and settlements close to Kamaranka. My plan was to meet with people and to familiarise myself with the geography, terrain, proximity of services and livelihood options. From my initial visit I was able to construct an overview of the socio-economic position of women in the communities. I was accompanied by an experienced project supervisor who led a team of six community workers based in the area and was responsible for delivery of community programmes implemented by a UNICEF funded NGO that was heavily

involved in the day-to-day survival of local communities. The team implemented Community Led Total Sanitation Programmes (CLTSPs), helped to construct and repair wells, installed toilets in schools, and was involved in the provision of basic maternal care and general healthcare.

I visited thirteen settlements within a radius of approximately fifteen kilometres of Kamaranka, most of which I revisited. I was guided by an NGO team leader, who was familiar with all of the groups. I selected settlements that appeared to be at varying levels of socio-economic development, determined by the location and area of land, selection of crops, proximity to water, quality of leadership and the strength and cohesiveness of women's groups. Each group was comprised of subsistence farmers who functioned at varying degrees of deprivation. The majority of members of women's networks, women's groups and individual women I met in Bombali were community farmers who functioned at survival levels without access to basic services (clean water, health and education) close to their settlements. They were dependent on augmenting their income during the rains through petty trading facilitated by loans to provide food and basic necessities. One interviewee referred to "saving for the rains".

Women's groups were established in response to conflict, displacement and loss. They came together and supported each other in their struggle to survive, demonstrating self-reliance and determination to embark on the process of reconstructing their lives. Most women in the groups took responsibility for payment of school fees, apart from one father in his early thirties who had seven children and was striving to pay for the education of them all at a cost of Le 25,000 per child. Families struggled to send their children to school in the belief that education would provide opportunities for them to progress in the future. They understood the importance of their children receiving an education, although many themselves have no formal schooling. Several larger groups with enhanced resources (including access to water and successful harvests with surpluses) had developed robust organisational structures and were reaching out to neighbouring settlements, forming networks and engaging in advocacy outside the immediate community. As women's groups expanded and formed networks, their horizons broadened; women moved further from home and made links with groups in neighbouring villages. The process gained momentum, and so the network and its range of influence broadened further still. One group referred to an obligation to consult with chiefs, the main landowners, as a prerequisite to undertaking activities, which ensured that the traditional power structure remained deeply embedded, even in relatively new communities, as I had also observed in Kaningo.

Community farmers worked together, sharing resources and allocating sufficient produce for survival, and then they sold surpluses. One community had a town crier who, when it was deemed necessary, called on people to stay back and help on the community farm. A recently widowed woman working on a local sanitation initiative had been given a bike by an NGO so that she could function as an ambassador and visit nearby communities. In several groups friction had arisen due to charging exorbitant interest rates on loans. References were made to polygamy and problems arising when several wives had to be supported, although I was not made aware of specific examples. Among most groups of participants in this study there was a strong sense that community had given people a sense of common purpose and had provided support during difficult times.

The emergence of women's groups within local communities appeared to have been an organic process. Groups created essential spaces within which women could become more self-assured, it gave them the opportunity to pick up the familiar threads of a traditional way of life at a time when they lacked confidence to embrace new social structures and ways of doing things. It gave them a space where they could develop a sense of autonomy, where exchanging and sharing of experiences, networking, organisation and mobilisation for change could all take place. When economic and social structures were destroyed, women's groups provided support, confirming a sense of security and of sharing. Comments made by interviewees confirmed this. For example, one woman said, "Everyone loves the group. The group is quiet, calm, sharing, the group meets sometimes and shares information" and another stated, "The group doesn't formally network, but we do share ideas on how to increase our income".

It is likely that conventional development programmes, if they reached these communities at all, could do more harm than good - initiatives could be seen as another alien system imposed from outside (that would no doubt be strongly resisted), and would lack relevance to the local vernacular. People were unlikely to identify with such initiatives; they could associate more readily with familiar traditions that have served them in the past, prior to upheavals in their lives. In such circumstances, they turned to the comfort of familiarity of culture and tradition as sources of support that protected them from the dangers of another invasion. I propose (in line with Shaw, 2002) that local groups evidently mistrust the government and its programmes as well as systems imposed by outsiders, which could be linked to historical memories of threats from outside. In this context, the introduction of development initiatives can be conceived as a fresh external threat.

6.8 Community Perspectives in Bombali:

Visits to the communities took the form of village gatherings where I introduced myself to chiefs and elders and then interacted with large groups and discussed, with the aid of interpreters, a range of topics that gave an indication of the socio-economic position of the villages and their inhabitants. After initial meetings which were scheduled to fit around villagers' activities and work, I conducted meetings with mixed groups of men and women, which I followed up in conversations with smaller groups of women (approximately six) and then individual participants. Participants responded positively to informal research, which I believe was less intrusive and produced wide-ranging comments that gave context to their daily lives. Participants' comments aligned with the aim of this thesis, which was to identify, provide background to, and give insight into the main challenges that populations such as this face, many of which are overlooked by conventional development policy and practice. Comments from participants in the different settlements in Bombali fell broadly into several key themes: Group Origins, Wives, Men's Roles, Networking, Loans and Extreme Hardship.

Group Origins:

Isatu: "I and some others were living here during the war. The rebels took all my belongings, everything, some people lived, and others died. [...] The group was formed in 2002 at the end of the war. It was primarily for the children, there was no finance, the system was bankrupt. There was no money for school fees or to look after anyone who was sick."

Samura: "The group was formed after the war in 2002; the rebels took everything, clothes, animals, everything. We have had to rebuild our lives, we have had to start again, we've come together and started again! Some are new to the community; others have always lived here."

Lamin: "The group was formed in 2003 in response to the war, a lot of people were lost, it was necessary to start again."

Foday: "The group was formed after the war in 2004. Everything was destroyed, a lot of lives were lost, people had to start from scratch. The group came together in an attempt to rebuild their lives. The community is now a mix of people who have come from different places."

Saffie: "Development is easier in a group, it's easier to develop together. Everyone benefits from being in the group."

Amie: "The group was formed for the benefit of the children."

Isatu: "The main aim of the group is to educate the children to give them a future." Isatu herself didn't go to school.

Wives:

Bessay: "I am the only wife although many men in the community have several wives."

Samura: "I am the only wife; I believe that's best. Some men have more wives, and this often causes problems."

Isatu: "Women should have a stronger voice! [...] It would be good to have a female advisor when there is conflict, at present a male mediates."

Surie (widow with nine dependents): "Women are fighting to come to the forefront. This is with men's backing. The men share the work."

Women's groups frequently looked to men as figures of authority which was likely the legacy of deeply rooted patriarchy. It indicated that women lacked confidence in their own authority. Despite negative comments made by several women regarding men's involvement in domestic activities and in daily routines (which expressed during group meetings of women without men), many women's groups continued to rely upon men to occupy organisational positions. For example, one group had a male secretary and organiser, and another had a male advisor. There was another a group that had men in the position of secretary, treasurer and organiser, although in future the group would, they said, consider electing women to these positions. I was told that one of the male secretaries "knew every detail of every financial transaction."

Men's Roles:

Isatu: "Boys help after school. It would be better if more men were involved."

Alusine: "Men will help when money's available."

Abu: "The men don't know much! [...] They are only helpers. [...] They don't attend meetings. [...] Everything was started by women."

Amie: "We have five men who 'police' the group. It is essential to have men as guides."

Adama: "Men help with the labour. They have influence, they share in decisions. [...] Respect for men has increased since the group was formed."

Memuna: "The men act as labourers; they do the heavy work - ploughing. Women do the planting and weeding."

Maria: "It works better with some men. We need men in the group, we have fewer women."

Saidu (male): "I labour for the farmers and I trade in the community."

Lamin (community farmer with seven children: three boys and four girls): “I try to support them as best I can. My seven children are in school which costs Le 25,000 each for the annual fee.”

Alie (twenty-three, left school when he was fourteen): “I find it hard to rebuild my life. My wife and I are farmers. We have a baby of five months. My mother is still alive but my father died. I have one brother and one sister. After the war land was distributed and divided, I asked for land and was given it by the land owner. My uncle carries the burden of paying for my wife’s younger brother to go to school; at present he’s at high school. I am supportive of my wife’s farming activities, the family helps with farming when necessary. I would like to expand the farm, my wife thinks this is a good idea. For the last four years I have been a member of the group which grants loans to each person strictly in rotation, [each in their turn other than when a family emergency arises, then an exception may be made]. I think the group is good, I am keen to develop it and to promote and expand its activities.”

Networking:

Lamin: “We are networking, we’ve made contact with executive members of different groups.”

Bessay: “We are planning to explore networking with other groups.”

Foday: “We want people from further away to join, [we] are keen to develop, our chairperson is meeting with other groups.”

Alie: “The group wants to develop and promote itself.”

Memuna: “We don’t formally network, but we share ideas with other groups and discuss how we can increase our income.”

Adama: “Everyone wants the group to grow; we are keen on the idea of networking.”

Foday: “The group wants to develop and for people from further away to join. There is emphasis on group work, community planning. [...] The chairperson plans to meet with other women’s’ groups to encourage more to join.”

Abu: “The group is reasonably influential and conducts advocacy outside the community.”

Loans:

Maria: “Loans are for survival and basic needs. Loans are not usually for business or trade. Trade is difficult. It involves ‘big money’ to get the produce to Kamakwie and to pay the council for a stall. This is not easy. There is a need to prioritise.”

Isatu: “The group prioritises and gives loans to the most needy. We use the money for school fees, when someone is sick or when anyone in the community has problems. There is no interest charged on money for school fees, only on sums loaned for trading.”

Bessay: “An individual may take a loan on behalf of others. Some loans are given from profits of the produce.”

Maria: "Loans are often for medication for sickness. When the person recovers, they repay the loan without interest."

Saffie: "I can barely manage: It is not easy. I won't get another loan because it isn't my turn. Traders take advantage when they know the farmers are having a hard time."

Bessay: "Interest rates are too high. Members are grumbling. They are trying to reduce the rates and cater for the majority. The group has decided on the current rate."

Amie: "There are problems with those who take loans. They don't turn up to meetings when they are due to repay the money. "

Memuna: "If for any reason I can't repay the loan, I will do community work, but I'm confident that I will be able to pay it back."

Maria: "Loans can be a problem. Sometimes there are exceptions, priorities, emergencies."

Lamin: "If there is a default the person has to do community work."

Foday: "Grave action is taken if anyone defaults. There is a penalty. The person is given a portion of grass to brush."

Maria: "If someone is unable to repay the loan, there will be a meeting with the chairperson and the chief and the person will be made to work in the cassava garden."

Memuna: "If there is a defaulter the men in the group force the person, usually a woman to pay, they threaten her. The defaulter's produce would be used to repay the money - this has never happened so far."

Extreme Hardship:

Saffie (community farmer grows peppers, potatoes and cassava): "In order to earn some money I sell some of my produce to traders from Makeni although they only give me a small amount. If I have money for next season I will plant groundnuts. Without groundnuts I will survive but it will not be easy."

Memuna (has seven children four girls and three boys): "My girls will attend school for the junior level only."

Mariama (farmer who sells to communities six to seven miles from her home): "Business is good, there are food shortages and because of extreme hunger it means I sell my produce quickly. I also generate extra money through processing gari [tie dye]."

Hannah (sixteen years old, a member of the 'Action Girls' group): "My father is not around, I am in form three junior, I will finish school when I am twenty, then I plan to go to Freetown to train as a nurse. I sell potatoes to raise the money I need to pay for my school fees, I dip into the Le 200 I allocate for lunch money to make my payment to the group. Any profit I make, I give to the family, they do their best to help me when it's possible. I take a loan when I need to pay for my school fees or to cover any emergencies."

6.9 Summary of Issues in Bombali

Several of the women who had assumed the role of head-of-household in the absence of men during the war expressed ambivalence towards men and the role they now occupied in the community. Role adjustments appeared to be difficult in the post-conflict period and could contribute to domestic friction, sometimes causing the breakdown of the family. Even when women are oppressed in circumstances such as these, they find ways to employ a degree of agency that will involve them in negotiation and decision-making (Kabeer, 1999).

The rural banking infrastructure was largely destroyed during the war, which meant that any local banks that were left were often too distant from the village or were unavailable.

Community members needed somewhere safe to deposit savings, so groups appointed treasurers who took responsibility for looking after the money. Families could be forced to take short-term loans to survive during difficult times (such as during the dry season, the 'dries') when they had to finance the stock they needed for petty trading. Usually it was women who took responsibility for repayment of the debt. Interest rates were often unrealistically high and were not standardised, which meant that borrowers found it extremely hard to make their repayments.

Among groups that appeared more cohesive and somewhat less disadvantaged, interest rates generally were more modest, and the system seemed to work reasonably well. But communities were in need of training and guidance on how best to set up and structure micro-finance schemes for when members of the community were in need of financial support to develop small to medium businesses or in emergencies and times of hardship. But an academic and head of community development at one of Freetown's principal colleges (see Interview D30, Chapter Six) was of the firm opinion that it was down to communities to be the drivers of change. His approach to community development was heavily reliant on policy that supported decentralisation and was designed to foster community autonomy. He stated:

provision of land for community projects is the responsibility of the community. It's necessary to involve all stakeholders. Community groups need to be set up with a head of community development, a mandate, clear vision and with ample discussion and debate be able to guide and encourage community development. There needs to be sensitisation and group organisation, not only through consultation with heads of community. It's essential to include all the members of the community in order to strengthen the community and make the structure sustainable.

It's essential to encourage local people to give something before they take! What will their contribution be? This will encourage a positive impact. I regard people as the resource; remedies should be based on responses. One has to be tactful with leaders and keenly aware of what is not being said. My approach is to generate activities in the communities and listen to responses. Don't impose, ask the question and let them tell us. Hear the stories.

(Researcher interview, 2013)

Fieldtrips to northern Sierra Leone enabled me to capture something of the essence of the lives of populations living in rural districts and hardships they faced. Women showed determination to overcome poverty, employing agency in adversity as they fulfilled their domestic role within the strict limitations imposed on them by traditional community structures. Despite challenging environments, organic connections were emerging that were supported through the creation of informal networks that linked households with community and district structures. In my observation, the skilled community workers I met in Sierra Leonean were conversant with local customs and practices and played an important role in the process 'on the ground'. Groups were becoming active members of organised community networks with the potential to act as key players in civil society and municipal and national politics. The entire process was dependent on skilled support. There were major challenges facing groups as they moved from the private to the public sphere and in the process.

During fieldwork (and as also noted by Desai, 1997), I was aware that it was essential for the observer to listen to marginalised women in order to begin to understand the world they inhabited. Indeed, the primary task of this investigation has been to listen, observe and document the stories of women in communities who, at present, are not part of the decision-making process. These narratives allow for a more nuanced and context specific examination of the social and economic matters that have a deep impact on the daily existence of women that are passed by in conventional approaches to development. My hope is that this data can be used to inform policy and practice, which will in turn contribute to forming part of a revised structure. At each stage in the development of my theory I have revisited and evaluated the concept of empowerment and its innumerable interpretations. I have questioned the relevance of the term when applied to local community women as a panacea that would guarantee improvement in their socio-economic position. As Winfield observed:

The central objective of empowerment is the creation of gender solidarity among women [...] Various motives bring women together at group level, usually beginning from the basic traditional premise that men are superior and women inferior with each gender competing inside confined socio-political space. If solutions are to be found, it is essential that both knowledge and empowerment are placed in context of

the women's conditions and de-linked from patriarchy, sexuality, colonialism and existing power structures. [...] Empowerment involves dealing with conflict and rivalries both external and internal.

(Winfield, 1997)

The women and girls who participated in this research highlighted key social and economic issues that affected their day-to-day lives. Conversations revealed disconnects between the language of development and its terminology claimed by Rahnema (1997) to be ambiguous, according to Brock & Cornwall (2005) used to explain situations and justify actions and its application on the ground. It highlighted the need for a revision of language to avoid obfuscation and abstraction from the real issues Brock & Cornwall (2005) and to be replaced instead by sensitive (and enlightened) interpretations that applied to the complex issues that affected participants' lives. In focus groups, group discussions, and group and individual interviews, women and girls expressed their needs and priorities. They articulated the importance of increasing their visibility as well as their need for support in their endeavours to establish a system of sustainable community development. In conversations with community members, attitudes towards the value of education varied according to levels of poverty. In some families, extremely poor parents regarded education as time wasted when the survival of family members was dependent on children working and earning money to feed the family; it was a recurring theme among the poorest groups I met in Kaningo and in Kamaranka. In more than one instance I was told by women in the community that parents actively encouraged young girls to work in the sex trade as a source of income to ensure the family's survival. Families in desperate circumstances, due to extreme poverty, denied the human rights of the girls, deprived them of education and, in doing so, condoned and perpetuated their low status.

6.10 Conclusion

In this chapter participants described their circumstances that, often as a direct result of war and displacement, resulted in the construction of new settlements and the emergence of new societal structures. Urban and rural groups had lost everything, and extraordinary change was forced upon them, but they were beginning to find their way. New communities were evolving and taking shape organically. Development, as in all groups, was an ongoing and uneven process. In relatively isolated rural districts and in urban settlements where people were disadvantaged, groups were, for the most part, functioning at survival levels. They lived in severe hardship beyond the reach of government initiatives which meant they were outwith the reach of development programmes.

In these circumstances, the strength of local groups was increasing and with the support of the community they were able to construct ways of living and working together that would improve future prospects for themselves and their children. In my observation, organisations such as Oxfam and BRAC (see Chapter Five, Interviews A2 & A3), were at the forefront of embracing elements of these new models of contextual development. Government ministries such as the MSWGCA was stretched far beyond its capacity (see Chapter Five, Interviews B9 & B10), and women's advocacy groups such as 50/50 that emphasised training of parliamentarians and focussed on achieving the 30% quota for women's representation, did so at the expense of a lack of engagement with local people (see Chapter Five, Interview C13). Action Aid appeared to be out of touch with the actual circumstances of the groups they were supposed to support, who in reality remained outside of their reach (see Chapter Five, Interview A4).

Women's networks and women's groups were making progress with the small-scale and less formal development projects they had set up. There was evidence of stronger cohesiveness among groups in rural districts in northern Sierra Leone than there was in Kaningo an urban environment in Freetown. I attribute this to the intensity of conflict that was concentrated in the north for long periods which compelled people to come together as a measure of survival. In settlements and villages in Kamaranka, collective work was carried out by groups that were dependent on agriculture as a primary subsistence and livelihood option. Both rural and (to a lesser degree) urban women's groups functioned collectively. Populations recreated familiar traditional structures that they depended upon for security.

7. CONTEXTUAL DEVELOPMENT: THE WAY FORWARD?

West African women are motivated to employ 'women peace activism' strategies to promote social justice in West Africa: (a region that includes Sierra Leone) where the majority of women remain marginalized and excluded from major spheres of decision-making along with efforts to terminate endemic physical and structural violence that exists in these societies. For a positive shift to occur in social attitudes and norms, legislation, political and administrative rules must be enacted.

(Ekiyor & Gbowee, 2005)

7.1 Introduction

My research was cut short in May 2014 when I was advised to leave the country and return to the United Kingdom following the outbreak of EVD. The pandemic was an additional setback for women who suffered stigma and superstition as the main carers who were in direct contact with the infected. The situation forced all educational establishments to remain shut until April 2015. Due to a steep rise in family poverty, many students, especially girls, were unlikely to re-enter education. Instead they would be forced to seek employment, and some would be encouraged to engage in sex work to ensure survival of the family. This was not uncommon in communities I visited and it increased during the EVD outbreak (IPPF, 2011; Sierra Leone News, 2013; Schwartz, Anoko & Abramovitz, 2019)

The epidemic exposed the absence of a functioning health system, a lack of equipment and insufficient qualified staff to deal with the pandemic within a system mired in corruption, and amid allegations of misappropriation of aid money that had been allocated to halt the spread of the virus and support populations (Shepler, 2017). The international response was initiated by Médecins sans Frontières (MSF), but action taken by the World Health Organisation (WHO) was described as confused and chaotic (Ross, Welch & Angelides, 2017). Populations were fearful and suspicious of the authorities, and rumours began to spread that the introduction of the virus was intentional (Shepler, 2017). Curfews were introduced, quarantines were imposed and at the height of the outbreak there was a lockdown that curtailed all movement in an attempt to contain the spread of the disease. There was stiff opposition (at times, erupting into violence) against interference with traditional practices such as the custom of cleansing corpses, which made it far harder to control the spread of EVD. In August 2017, Freetown suffered a further catastrophe when the city was hit by a gigantic mudslide, which swept from the Regent

village down through the Lumley valley into the Babadorie river valley, devastating parts of Kaningo, Malama, Kamayana and Juba. Eight road and pedestrian bridges were either destroyed or damaged which meant that Kaningo was completely cut off. The disaster was the result of three days of torrential rain, and was exacerbated by deforestation and uncontrolled building on steep hillsides. Eleven hundred and forty one people were declared dead or missing with over 6,000 affected. (Trenchard, 2018; Glynn, 2018). These appalling events expose the vulnerabilities of populations and further complicate the challenges discussed in this investigation.

Chapter One of this thesis set out the purpose of this research: to determine why, despite a sustained financial and programme response to support the GoSL with resources coming from donors including DFID, USAID, the UN's Country Team (UNCT) and the European Union (EU), there has been so little improvement in the socio-economic status of women in Sierra Leone. While my argument that development policy and practice needs to be revised resonates with previous studies, I contend that this investigation advances the debate because it examines the status of women through collection and analysis of primary data and proposes responses that have the potential to mitigate, and subsequently offer solutions to, development issues that affect women.

In Chapter Two I presented the theoretical framework that this thesis draws upon. I examined alternatives to mainstream development through the lens of post-development theorists, (e.g. Escobar, 1995; Latouche, 2015; Rahnema, 1998), proponents of paradigms that I believe have the potential to stimulate progress towards women's equality and empowerment. Many theorists I have referenced argue that large-scale initiatives based on Western models favoured by UN agencies are unworkable in a local context principally because they are not aware of the *actual* priorities and *real* needs of groups they are designed to support. I examined the influence of development-related language that I argue restricts debate on policy and programming and therefore interferes with progression of development initiatives. Finally, I considered the implications of poor governance and corruption and how these issues obstruct social and economic progress affecting the poorest most severely, a high proportion of women living in extremely disadvantaged groups.

The third chapter examined how the interwoven strands of history, culture and tradition have contributed to women's inequality. I considered the degree to which cultural beliefs, practices and traditions block women's progress in a society dominated by patriarchy. I investigated practices of female secret societies, the Bondo and Sande, to determine the degree to which

such groups influence girls, encouraging them to subscribe to a traditional way of life that acts in opposition to them achieving equality and empowerment. I illustrated the close relationship between traditional practices and the strength of belief in the occult, and explored reasons why women continue to observe practices that are detrimental to them and maintain their subjugated position in society. I concluded that the erosion of women's status had been incremental, taking place over centuries, and that this can only be reversed when a shift in societal attitudes takes place. I argue that education is the route to women's progression towards equality and empowerment, and I stress that this must be backed by stringent application of legislation.

In Chapter Four, I moved on to scrutinise education structures and learning methodologies in more detail through a combination of fieldwork and reference to existing academic literature, relevant reports and other documentation. I discussed traditional learning methods, considered the long-term disruption to education caused by colonialism and its legacy, and considered the importance of reinstating African history and culture into the curriculum. I examined obstructions that interfere with access to education for women and girls and I demonstrated the positive role that education has in creating future opportunities. My conclusion is that marginalisation of youth (both male and female) is due to enduring and harmful patriarchal societal structures that need to be modified and subsequently eradicated through sensitive education initiatives. The curriculum requires complete revision to reflect cultural representation and to tell the country's history, structured so that it focuses on equality and ensures students can reach their full potential, allocating them an active role in the development of society.

Chapter Five expands my investigation to include perspectives drawn from interviews with members of UN agencies, senior government officials, INGOs, NGOs, women's networks and associations and advocacy groups. Perspectives of policy makers, government officials and development stakeholders indicated weaknesses in the structure, implementation and monitoring of government ministries and departments that functioned without adequate resources to deliver national health, welfare and education projects. Interviews confirmed the prevalence of GBV and SBV, showing that it was endemic in society, and exposed the inadequacy of available resources to eradicate such unacceptable practices. Several bureaucrats described corrupt practices, cronyism and nepotism which they referenced in abstract terms intimating they were embedded in the system. They showed no signs of taking a stand against such practices or bearing responsibility for failing to carry out their remit, which led me to

deduce that it was highly likely they were also active in this corrupt system. Interviews presented in this chapter exposed serious faultlines in bureaucratic structures and operational and monitoring systems, both of which impact negatively on project outcomes.

In the penultimate chapter, I presented primary data collected among urban and rural groups who subsisted at minimum survival levels. The majority of women confirmed that they lived beyond the reach of the government, UN agencies, INGOs or NGOs development programmes. Women and girls spoke of their aspirations, which my previous conversations with bureaucrats (see Chapter Five) confirmed were not being met. My data evidences that exploitation and violence against women was normalised and demonstrates the strength of women's agency in extreme adversity. I learned that GBV and SBV were commonplace in society, and witnessed it first hand. I learned that teacher's abuse of girls was tolerated, and that girls were sent out to work in the sex trade by their families, among many other abhorrent practices that were abusive of women and girls. My data demonstrated beyond doubt that women were marginalised and that their skills and knowledge were not respected, nor were they integrated into the development process.

In the remainder of this concluding chapter, I summarise key findings and I revisit my theoretical framework using it as the basis for my response to the issues that have emerged in the course of this investigation. I draw on threads of my research that I position within a contextual framework and contend that the relevance of context goes largely unrecognised: despite theorists from the 1970's onwards emphasising its importance, context resides on the peripheries of development. I propose revisiting concepts such as Degrowth and Buen Vivir, put in the context of Sierra Leone and adopting (and adapting where necessary) the rudiments of these options which I argue align with the needs of both urban and rural groups. In times when "the global capitalist juggernaut" (Leach, 2002, p. p. 267) is under intense scrutiny, these strategies show signs of success in Latin American countries. Several nations including Ecuador, Bolivia, Chile, Mexico and Argentina share commonalities with Sierra Leone in their historic and economic backgrounds. Each has experienced periods of slavery, colonialism, conflict, and social and economic issues exacerbated by extractive industries that have combined to contribute to widespread poverty. Therefore, I maintain that elements of these paradigms (detailed in Chapter Two) are well-suited to being integrated into policy and practice in Sierra Leone as part of a plan for sustainable development.

7.2 Summary of Key Findings

Results of research conducted in the course of this investigation indicate that history, culture and tradition adversely affect women's socio-economic position in society. Conversations confirmed that traditional customs and practices exert control over women and girls, they restrict women's freedom of choice and independence in key areas of their lives. Several participants were of the view that change was needed to reduce the power of traditional leaders as it was common for chiefs to exploit their influence and use it to their personal advantage. Chiefs, elders and community leaders retain control over the local judiciary system, the collection of tax revenues and the coordination of local development activities (Fanthorpe, 2005). Therefore, these leaders are reluctant to relinquish their privileged status and renounce the prevailing system of patrimonial traditionalism because doing so would result in a loss of their control over local governance and decision-making, communication, information, knowledge and economic resources (Ekundayo-Thompson, 2012).

As long as rigid social conventions endure within the patriarchal system of Sierra Leone, young people remain marginalised and are denied their entitlement to make a significant contribution to the reconstruction of their nation. This counters the aspirations of young women and men who expressed their determination to play an integral role in the shaping of the future of their country (see Chapters Four, Five and Six). Shaw (2002) discusses agency in terms of the oppressed as well as the oppressor, she observed women inventively subverting practices within a patriarchal environment to suit their own purposes. My observations during fieldwork were that community members functioning within the restrictions of dominant patriarchal structures demonstrated immense ingenuity in management of their circumstances. I observed this was often applied as a survival tactic.

My research confirmed that cultural rituals and procedures are engrained in the psyche, shaping ways in which women and men perceive and interact with the world they inhabit. Practices such as FGM, for example, delineate women's position in society pressurising them to maintain a traditional lifestyle that endorses women's subjugation and social inferiority. FGM is widespread; an estimated 89.6% of women aged between fifteen and fifty-nine are cut (IDC, 2014). Successful elimination of the practice will hinge on positive collaboration with Soweis who have the power to effect change. During periods of fieldwork I was aware of signs of growing resistance to the practice of initiation among younger women, especially those who had received even a basic level of education and lived and worked outside their communities.

Galeano (1997), with reference to countries in Latin America, suggests that the legacy of oppression during a colonial past becomes embedded and can be repeated. (see also Shaw, 2002; Fanthorpe, 2009; Escobar, 2015). In the case of Sierra Leone, Shaw (2002) suggests that memories can resurface, albeit in different guises, and encourage repetition of violence and atrocities during future periods of instability. Close scrutiny of periods of history in Sierra Leone convinced me that 'memoryscapes' endure across generations and can be rekindled during periods of repression, especially among isolated groups who continue to live according to tradition. Memoryscapes also link with the practices of the Bondo and Sande secret societies who, it can be argued, sustain their power through maintaining close ties with witchcraft and the occult, as reflected on by Shaw (2002) who references historical and anthropological accounts of Sibthorpe (1868 cited by Fyfe, 1992) and Fyfe (1992).

7.3 International Development

In this thesis I have advanced a critique of the discourse, policy and practice of mainstream development that is shaped by the West and is set out in policy that is funded and put into practice by international agencies including UNICEF, UNDP, DFID, and the WHO. Primary data collected during this study reveals deep-rooted flaws in the development infrastructure. I maintain that international development that overlooks or is ignorant of context, local culture and traditions, cannot fully comprehend the fundamental reasons for women's exclusion and it therefore struggles to respond appropriately to the requirements of disadvantaged groups. My findings confirm the importance of recognising and consolidating links between context and development as this will increase understandings of challenging issues, which will lead to new possibilities emerging that can successfully resolve obstructions at a local level. Therefore I affirm that primary contextual research is the first step to be taken prior to formulation of reforms designed to improve impact and outcomes. Context, in addition to its application to locale or space, also has wider-reaching implications; it signifies social, emotional/psychological and discursive dimensions (Marchand & Parpart, 1995, p. 77). I reiterate, based on this research that 'context' as a development term merits recognition as a central pillar in the quest for sustainable development.

In its 2010 report the UN set out results of an appraisal of progress achieved towards sustainable development. It identified a gulf between multilateral policies, goals and processes and implementation at the national level reflecting domestic political and economic realities. The report found a lack of action on the ground in spite of publicly-declared support for

sustainable development. The document refers to difficulties that arise in translating theory into practice and in the narrow definition of development that equates it with growth. Systemic changes, it states, require a revolution in the way the world does business that will impact on lifestyles and consumption patterns. The report is pertinent now, providing an accurate assessment of the current state of mainstream development (Drexhage & Murphy, 2010. Pp. 3-6).

What we call aid money serves only to strengthen the structures that generate poverty. Aid money never reaches the victims who, having lost their real assets, look for alternative ways of life outside the globalized system of production which are better suited to their needs.

(Bawtree & Rahnema, 2003, cited by Latouche, 2004)

Socio-economic progress in Sierra Leone has been beset by downturns in the economy and disasters³⁵, compounded by an extreme lack of commitment from the GoSL. Certain sectors have been starved of funding and resources that on occasion resulted in programme cancellation. Staff indicated they were not linked into an operational bureaucratic processess, which created an environment open to corruption and abnegation of responsibility. Several senior officials said they did not have government funding or resources to create effective legal and social structures that were within their remit. Systemic failings were confirmed through triangulation of interviews with officials in INGOs and womens' networks (see Chapter Five, Group B and Group C, and Chapter Six, Interviews with women in rural and urban communities). Results of research in Chapters Five and Six confirmed state-level policy-makers' overall inability to deliver sustainable local development initiatives.

Conversation and interaction with urban and rural women in interviews, focus groups, and discussions, as well as in one-to-one conversations (see Chapter Six) demonstrated that women and their families were not served by government initiatives nor did they benefit from formal support systems. Fieldwork confirmed infringements of human rights: women and their families were without adequate shelter, food and clean water, and they were functioning at minimum survival levels (see Chapter Six). My research in urban and rural communities established that women and girls did not participate in the decision-making process to a degree that could effect change; their voices were inaudible in the development debate, and development programmes designed to alleviate social and economic issues that impact negatively on women were not implemented to any meaningful degree. I noted that women

³⁵ For example, the 2008 commodity price crash, the 2014/2015 EVD pandemic, and the 2017 Freetown mudslide.

who had been displaced as a result of the conflict, and who had assumed the role of head-of-household due to loss or absence of partners were, due to extreme poverty, under immense economic and domestic pressures to ensure the survival of themselves and their families. Rural groups and (to a lesser degree) urban groups responded to their situation by seeking security in the re-instatement of familiar traditional domestic and economic structures.

My observation was that enduring traditional concepts of youth obstruct young men and women's progress towards maturity and independence and block their socio-economic progress. The dominance of patriarchy can thus be seen as a restraining force that controls and constrains youth. It deprives young men and women of their entitlement to freedom of choice and independence, preventing their pursuit of careers of their choice. Chiefs and elders regarded young men as children, denying them responsibility until they reached around thirty-five years of age, as was shown when The Bench of Hope young men's group proposed a fund-raising scheme to establish a vocational training centre. Girls after (sometimes forced) initiation sanctioned by the (usually male) chief (see Chapter Five), were routinely taken out of education and married to older men.

7.4 Education & Healthcare for Women & Girls

My investigation of women's and girls' access to education indicated that high poverty levels meant families prioritised boys education, which acted to endorse women and girl's inequality, as well as their exclusion from decision-making, thus perpetuating their low status. Moreover, national education initiatives fail to deliver on their aims, as evidenced in my research. The education sector was completely dysfunctional (as evidenced in extracts of the reports cited in Chapter Four), and the system actually threatened the safety of women and girl rather than providing the security and support that female students should have been able to rely upon. Existing data evidenced that the universal free primary education programme (UPE) introduced in 2003 had been poorly implemented (Gbamanja, 2010) and there has been limited reach and availability of the free healthcare initiative launched in 2010, which abolished charges for pregnant women, lactating mothers and children under five. Both of these programmes had been designed to support women, but were not effective in doing so. The majority of the participants in my research, both urban and rural, relied on traditional healers and medicines, and a minority - those who could - paid for medical treatment and medicines, if it was available and affordable.

7.5 Routes of Progression: Post-development & Buen Vivir

Limitations of existing development approaches led me to seek viable alternatives that would be capable of supporting women and girls. I was influenced by post-development theorists and practitioners (see Chapter Two), particularly proponents of the concept of Buen Vivir (BV) and Latouche who devised a revisionist system based on 8Rs - inter-dependent goals that inspire Degrowth (Latouche, 2015, p. 33). Principles (and adaptations) of BV diverge from mainstream development in ways that I believe can be used to aid resolution of principal socio-economic issues in Sierra Leone. BV, as advocated by Escobar (2015), Gudynas (2011), and Caria and Dominguez (2016), originated in Andean ethnic traditions that prize quality of life achieved through community activity (Gudynas, 2011), a philosophy adopted into the Ecuadorian (2008) and Bolivian (2009) constitutions, though subsequently revoked (see Chapter Two), that position ecology, human dignity and social justice above economic objectives. The principal of BV is summarised by Ramirez as follows:

Buen Vivir rejects the foundations of mainstream development theory. The new pact of coexistence emphasises the construction of new worlds, in contrast to the Western civilizational proposal which is centred on the productive/economic sphere, on consumption.

(Ramirez, 2010b, p. 64)

Buen Vivir emerges from indigenous traditions that were suppressed during centuries of colonialism in Latin American countries (Gudynas, 2011); traditions that sit in opposition to a Western, anthropocentric, capitalist and economy-driven paradigm of modernity (Vanhulst & Beling, cited in Caria & Dominguez, 2014, p. 56). BV advocates harmony with nature, respect for the values and principles of indigenous peoples and satisfaction of basic needs, while positioning social justice and equality as responsibilities of the state and democracy. The paradigm explores alternatives beyond Eurocentric perspectives and recognises the importance of indigenous knowledge, which I assert aligns with priorities of populations in Sierra Leone. It is, according to Salazar (2015), “a concept and a lived practice under construction that relates to the wellbeing of the individual within the community and within the specific cultural natural environment.” Walsh counsels that BV is not without its problems, inconsistencies and contradictions (Walsh, 2010, p. 20). She cautions of its visibility within multilateral and transnational institutions protective of their political and economic interests and stability and warns against the universalisation of BV that is reminiscent of geopolitics of development in the past (Walsh, 2010, p.20). Concepts such as BV previously considered ‘alternative’ are coming to the fore as pressure mounts regarding the crisis of climate change, the need for humans to

reduce their carbon footprint, and rising inequalities. There is recognition of the urgency to create a consensus that will underpin major societal and economic movement towards holistic development.

7.6 Application of Buen Vivir in Sierra Leone

The concept of BV takes the debate forward, proposing structures that are rooted in inclusive development. Its rights-based approach focuses on health, shelter, education, food and the environment, and in Bolivia 'Bibir Bien' principles stress the ethical and moral principles of unity, dignity, equality, freedom, solidarity, reciprocity, social and gender equity, social justice and responsibility, all of which are linked to State economic organisation (Gudynas, 2011). Ecuador and Bolivia regard BV structures as central to making policy that supports a reform plan based on traditional concepts of development (Caria & Dominguez, 2016). BV as proposed in Bolivia (*suma qamaña*) is an example of powerful cultural innovation and capabilities that are rooted in indigenous knowledge and traditions (Gudynas, 2011). In each individual country, BV proposes a range of contextual options that are empathetic to communities and their needs, as practised in Latin America. The concept de-links from colonialism, recognises the importance of indigenous knowledge and is active in the rebuilding of cultural identities. These threads have commonalities with the trajectory of Sierra Leone, therefore I propose development policy-makers and practitioners should consider adaptations of BV as transferable to Sierra Leone, and as options that can potentially enhance project impact and outcomes.

The progression from a Eurocentric (colonial) view of the world towards recognition of the pluriverse and the many ontological concepts that exist in the post-colonial world (Escobar, 2015) (see Chapter Two) align with a growing awareness of the deficits inherent in globalisation. Countries face a task of immense proportions in putting these philosophies into practice, but I stress that it is crucial to take the first step in order to inspire debate that can activate this transformation. Gudynas (2011) takes this to the next level with his proposal that BV can act as a force that moderates gender inequalities that are embedded in indigenous traditions and proposes it recognises the role of women's agency, though this is difficult to verify. I propose that through alignment with the concepts outlined in this study an eventual reversal of the pattern of marginalisation and disempowerment of women can begin.

I link the issue of survival with the rejection and stigma experienced by carers of the infected during the EVD pandemic (see Chapter Three). At such times communities cling to long-established customs and practices as a defence mechanism and for protection against perceived

threats (Bourdieu, 1988; Leach, 1994; Shaw, 2002). Fear motivates such reactions among populations that have endured trauma and violence. I suggest this as an explanation for occasions when, even in my experience during relatively short periods of fieldwork, I became aware of degrees of mistrust directed towards me as the outsider.

Ekundayo-Thompson (2012, p. 172) note that, “Sierra Leone faces the challenge of creating an environment for sustained economic and social development that creatively responds to the needs of young people”. With the support of education, young people can play a pivotal role in development, thus realising their aspirations for the future and the future of their own children. This optimistic vision, however, does not reflect the actual situation that I observed during fieldwork. Disaffected youth appeared to be marginalised, de-linked from a system that was weakened by a combination of poor governance, an absence of basic welfare, and a lack of access to quality education and training, which creates high rates of unemployment.

Major failings in the education sector were confirmed in the Gbamanja Report (2010) which revealed the depth of the problems and highlighted the lack of progress in attempts to deliver education programmes and raise educational standards. By 2014, there appeared to be little progress according to a senior official participating in this project (see Chapter 5, Interview B11). A principal challenge was to achieve prescribed target outcomes at primary and junior secondary levels so that students could successfully transition into the workplace. The educational priority was that a cohort leaving school ‘should be capable of work.’ He implied that it was beyond the scope of the sector to develop vocational and skills training, stating:

There is not the leadership in the Ministry of Education in Sierra Leone to take it forward. The African Development Bank (AdB) programme provided funding for a tertiary skills college – the Ministry of Education did not provide teachers or funding to pay their salaries.

(Researcher interview, B11, 2014)

During construction of the Ivor Leigh Memorial School (in Kaningo) young workers did gain experience and they also acquired useful skills. But at that time, funding was not available to provide them with training that would certificate their skills or give them start-up kits to set up as carpenters, masons, builders or electricians, or in other practical trades. Members of the Young Ladies of Kaningo young women’s group with basic skills in professional cooking, tailoring and hairdressing shared their expertise among younger members who otherwise had no access to training. The group planned to establish a cooperative that would support them in setting up small-scale businesses. My findings from fieldwork highlight that young people are

determined to progress and urgently require education and training that will expand their employment opportunities. Weaknesses in the education sector must be addressed to allow for students to make a seamless transition from education to the competitive workplace environment and to ensure they have the necessary skills. In summary, young women and men are extremely aspirational (as documented in Chapter Six) but are frustrated by limited options with regard to three principal factors. First, provision of quality education and training. Second: access to quality education and training. Third: availability of careers advice and a system of work placements. These problems mean that access to further and higher education is severely restricted and, due to cost, is unavailable to the majority who are poor. At the time of writing, Milton Margai College of Education and Technology, Njala University and the University of Sierra Leone were aware of the issues and had plans to introduce a system of careers advice and work placements.

I consider the reinstatement of African culture to be a central pillar in the curriculum so that young people can rediscover their history and construct an African identity. But Gudynas (2011) suggests a caveat: there is a risk that this move will strengthen patriarchy and therefore negatively affect the position of women. The issue requires research, results of which will give adequate forewarning and inform a planned syllabus that will avoid any such regression. Wiredu (cited in Waghid, Waghid & Waghid, 2018) developed an African Philosophy of Education online course with the aim of creating a pedagogic discourse that foregrounds the African condition that aims to bridge oral traditions and introduce students to alternative ways of knowing, doing and being. Wiredu states that within this framework there must be recognition of a plurality of 'truths', suggesting tolerance of other views:

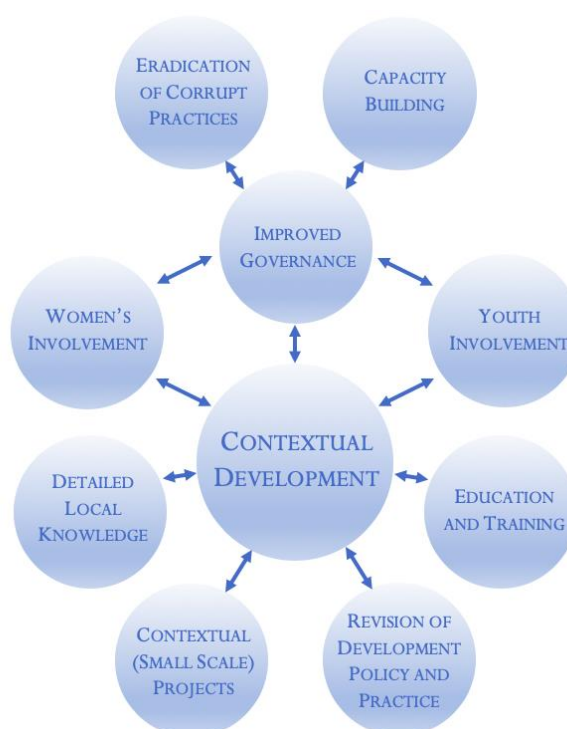
Any African effort to construct a philosophy for contemporary living by combining insights of traditional philosophy with those originating from elsewhere is an effort in the Africanisation of philosophical studies.

(Wiredu 2005, p.17, cited by Waghid, Waghid, & Waghid, 2018,p.3)

I propose that the above quote (referring to university level teaching) suggests a practical, integrationist approach towards African studies and culture embedded in a revised curriculum. Waghid, Waghid and Waghid have devised, developed and implemented a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) that is open to congruent Western philosophies and ideas without rejecting non-African opinions. Embedded in the education philosophy is a culture that nurtures production of both universal (global) and particular (local) knowledge that is relevant

to Africa's advancement and accommodate prevailing community customs and is rooted in context (Wiredu, 2005, p.18 cited by Waghid, Waghid & Waghid, 2018, p.6). Adoption of a curriculum model reflecting these philosophies will actively encourage students to reclaim their heritage while exposing them to ideas set out on the global stage that will enable them to take control of shaping their own futures and that of their country.

Diagram 4. Revised lateral contextual model of development reliant on collaboration and interaction between sectors designed to facilitate implementation of small-scale projects.



7.7 Contextual Development

The implementation of contextual development, positioned within a lateral framework as set out in the above diagram, represents a way of minimizing disconnects in the development process. I believe this structure will encourage expansion of small-scale local initiatives that are able to support communities to become sustainable in the medium to long-term. Application of hypotheses that focus on context demonstrate potential to address weaknesses in current development policy and practice. Emphasis on context presents an opportunity to maximise womens' indigenous skills and knowledge and to employ their social and cultural capital, which are central to grassroots development. In due course this system can be scaled-up, fed into policy and programme that is grounded in context, thus contributing to the elimination of obstacles to development. My findings align with post-development theorists who denounce current development policy and practice as Eurocentric, arguing that its application is inappropriate for 'local' (i.e., non-Western) contexts. The table below represents a practical structure of contextual development.

Level	Groups	Context	Action
Community	SHGs Women's groups Women's networks	Poverty Survival Routes of progression	Establish relationship between appropriate levels. Provide quality education, vocational training, advocacy training.
National	State government, CBOs, NGOs.	Programme delivery to improve impact and outcomes	Improve connections with and understanding of context Facilitate communication between different groups. Reinstate African culture and custom in curriculum.
International	UN agencies INGOs	Allocation of funding, programme monitoring, ability to prioritise / considered response to requirements	Revise policy and programme to reflect local needs. Improve standard of local knowledge. Improve response to local demands. Stringent Monitoring & Evaluation systems to be put in place.

Table 4. Contextual Development

With regard to education, the implementation of sensitive curricula will create a shift in rigid societal attitudes towards traditional customs and practices, especially the potentially harmful, repressive and dangerous practice of FGM. The extent to which such practices still remain embedded in culture is illustrated by threats of coercive or forced initiation (see Chapter Six) that were narrowly escaped by both female and male researchers in villages where they were conducting fieldwork. Education is the main tool to challenge such practices. Changes in cultural practices need to be formulated in collaboration with a full range of participants and endorsed by committed and trustworthy governance. For example, in local forums there must be inclusive consultation regarding community issues, not only among chiefs, elders and Mammy Queens but, most importantly, with full input from community members so that results are achieved in the interests of all. Consensus must be reached among all those concerned regarding the re-evaluation of the principal roles of Chiefs, Mammy Queens and Elders. Likewise, constraints placed on women and girls must be challenged backed by concerted efforts to reduce and eradicate tolerance of VAWG.

7.8 Summary of Research

Early in my investigation I realised that the notion of context would constitute the core of my research. Collection and analysis of primary data through direct contact with local groups and individuals (across various strata of society) was my chosen method of data gathering. It enabled me to gain insight into the *real* issues that affected womens' lives. When I transferred findings

from fieldwork and positioned them within a contextual framework it aided my understanding of the issues and enabled me to consider new routes towards the resolution of development problems. Based on my observations, I assert that the success of future projects is dependent on development being delivered by local groups through local structures but, as cautioned by Parpart, Rai and Staudt (2002), even the most marginalised are subject to global and national forces. Progress will ultimately be in the hands of the community and will be dependent on people's innate energy, skills and wisdom with systems and programmes initiated, directed and driven by local groups (Kabeer, 1994). This investigation has led me to test the status quo of development practice that favours the language of empowerment and participation yet struggles to interpret its concepts into meaningful action, or to demonstrate an understanding of the underlying complex, socio-economic factors and the impact of corrupt practices.

In earlier chapters I proposed that the Western binary view of corruption is overly simplistic and cannot be applied to a patriarchal, hierarchical society such as in Sierra Leone. My findings were that 'corrupt practices' such as diversion or appropriation of funding are embedded in the system, permeating all strata of society. They hit the poorest the hardest, forcing them to pay even for basic services they are entitled to, to secure employment, and to trade, as I observed during my fieldwork. At a higher level, misappropriation of funding results in money being unavailable to deliver basic projects that are intended to support the poor, such as provision of clean water, sanitation and healthcare (see Chapter Six). Shepler (2017) uses misappropriation of funding during the EVD crisis as a basis from which to conduct a more widespread analysis of the peoples' expectations of the state and their mistrust of politicians. Shepler's analysis corroborates the observation that corruption is rife and accountability and transparency are extremely weak (Shepler, 2017, p. 469), which supports my findings. The GoSL now needs to commit to change, and to take action that will reduce the power of patrimony and nepotism, which allows people who lack the required knowledge or qualifications to be given key positions.

7.9 Limitations of Study

The aim of this study has been to provide fresh insight into issues that obstruct the progress of women in Sierra Leone and to offer potential routes of resolution to the problems. During the investigation, I worked within strict limits of budgetary, time, infrastructure and access constraints. My intent was to collect primary data from selected samples of participants through observation, interaction, conversation, group discussions and focus groups on a wide range of

socio-economic topics that affect women. I am aware that in seeking answers my investigation has also raised important questions, which indicates the need for research to be ongoing to stimulate debate centred around economic, social and cultural issues that deny women their rights.

Data was gathered from selected groups across societal strata that included community women and men, community groups, women's networks, women's associations, government ministries, NGOs, INGOs, and UN agencies. Employment of principally ethnographic methodology enabled me to triangulate data, cross-referencing it to verify or challenge results, which enabled me to gather material that is not recorded in the majority of official documents and reports and therefore provides some insight into the position of women in Sierra Leone.

7.10 Conclusion: Contribution of Thesis

The overall purpose of this thesis has been twofold: first, through collection of primary data my aim has been to identify and examine the main reasons why women's low status in Sierra Leone remains largely unaddressed by mainstream development; and second, through the application of an appropriate theoretical framework to recommend potential routes of progress. Primary data collected from participants in distinct groupings have been triangulated, adding a critical dimension of contextual understanding to the problems. My intention is that this material should stimulate discussion, the results of which will contribute to the future resolution of development issues that will in turn result in the enhancement of the status of women and girls in Sierra Leone.

Context as a core constituent of development is contingent on affirmative action by the GoSL and its full commitment to the improvement of standards, upgraded governance, transparency and accountability, each of which requires constructive action to be taken by dedicated legislators and administrators. Further primary research is essential to ensuring the continuation of the discussion, which can then inform policy-makers and development practitioners. Empowerment (equality) of women and girls depends on a robust and transparent educational system that enfranchises students, realises their aspirations and transforms their lives. But there is a caveat: transformation of women and girls' lives is dependent on the full sanction and cooperation of the Soweï, who will be instrumental in supporting female enrolment in school. Soweï will play the main role in the process of improving the overall status of women and girls in Sierra Leone.

I conclude this thesis on a positive note. On January 21st 2019 in a letter to regional ministers the Minister of Local Government and Rural Development announced a countrywide ban on initiation of girls under eighteen in Sierra Leone (The Namibian, 2019) Debate is ongoing concerning this sensitive issue, along with enquiry into approaches that will ensure compliance by Soweis who will be required to give their support to the implementation of the ban.

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APPENDIX 1: RURAL WOMEN'S GROUPS

Table 5. Rural women's groups established post-conflict

Group name	When set up	No. of members	Member's name	No. of children	Savings	Loans and purpose	Interest
Tawopaneh 'Rowala Up'	2006	30 women	Surie	9	1,000 p. month.	Medical, school fees	
Kunthaya Sabenty	2002	40 women	Isatu	4	300 – 500 per week.	Medical, school fees	None for school fees, only for trading
Kunthaya 'Go Before'	2009	25 women 5 men	Amie	6	2,000 p. two weeks (max)	School fees 30,000 for 1 month	33%
Kanthaya Sabenty	2002	52 women	Samura	3			
Tawopaneh 'Rowala up'		12 women 3 men	Abu				
Kanthaya 'Go Before'			Bessay	2			High!
Mamank Community 'We are trying to Settle'	2004	50 women 20 men	Foday		2,000 p. month (dry) 1,000 (rains)	School fees, medical	20% (no interest charged for medical)
Tamaraneh Community 'Matam group'		15 women 10 men	Maria	4	2,000 p. month (dry) 1,000 (rains)	School fees, uniforms, survival, basic needs	
Tamaraneh, Matam community, 'Help Ourselves'		35 women 5 men	Saffie	6		20,000 loan taken for 2 months	10%
Tamaraneh, Gbomsamu Community	2007	13 women 5 men	Adama	4	1,000 p. month (dry) 500 (rains)	2,000 loan for 1 month	50%
Mamank Community 'Trying to Settle'		35 women 4 men	Memuna	7		Famine 40,000 loan for 3 months	8%
Manaise Community	2003	25 women 20 men	Lamin	4	1,000 p. month	health, education. 10,000 loan for 2 months	10%
Gbomsamu 'Community Action'	2007	14 women 1 man	Isatu	6	1,000 p. month (dry) 500 (rains)	business, farming, education 50,000 loan for 1 month	45%
Manorsabent Group	2007	25 women 5 men	Memuna	4	500 p. month (dry) 1,000 (rains)	50,000	10%

APPENDIX 2: MDGs 2000 - 2015

Table 6. MDG End-of-Programme Progress, 2015

Goal/Target	Indicator	2015: Target	2015: Status	Achievement
Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger	Poverty gap at \$1. 90 per day (2011 purchasing power parity)	0%	16.7%	Some progress but target not met
	Proportion of population below national absolute poverty line	40%	16. 7%	Target not met
Achieve Universal Primary Education	Gross enrolment in primary education	100%	122%	Target met on one indicator
	Proportion of pupils enrolled in grade 1 and reaching completion of primary	100%	76%	Target not met
	Literacy rate (15 – 24 yrs.)	100%	62% female, 76% male (total 64. 3%)	Some progress but target not meet
Reduce Child Mortality	Under-five mortality rate	95 per 1,000	156 deaths per 1,000 live births	Some progress but target not met
	Infant mortality rate	50 per 1,000	92 deaths per 1,000 live births	
Improve Maternal Health	Maternal mortality ratio	450 deaths per 100,000 live births	1,165 deaths per 100,000 live births	No targets achieved but progress made
	Proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel	100%	59.7%	
	Women aged 15 – 49 married or in union, using contraception	30%	16.6%	

(Millennium Development Goals Report, 2015)

APPENDIX 3: GENDER EQUALITY LEGISLATION, SIERRA LEONE

Table 7: Legislation enacted by GoSL in support of gender equality and women's empowerment

Date	Legislation
1979	Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)
1995	4 th Women's Conference, Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action
2000-2015	MDG3 Universal Primary Education (UPE)
2000 (adopted)	National Action Plan for full implementation of UN Security Council Resolutions (UNSCRs) UNSCR 1325, UNSCR 1820 and UNSCR 1825? Women, Peace and Security
2010-2013	Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs (MSWGCA) gender policies: implementation of 'National Strategic Plan'.
2007	Domestic Violence Act
2007	Devolution of Estates Act
2007	Registration of Customary Marriage and Divorce Act
2007	Child Rights Act
2009	Chieftancy Act
2012	Sexual Offences Act
2016-2030	SDGs (integrated into National Plan) (women and girls) (1) Ending poverty, (2) Zero hunger, (4) quality education, (5) gender equality

APPENDIX 4: SIERRA LEONE EDUCATION STRUCTURE

Table 8: Sierra Leone's 6 -3 -3 - 4 System of education

Level	Age / duration	Examination /Content / Activities	Examining Board
Primary	6 - 12	National Primary School Examination	(designed by) West African Examinations Council
Junior Secondary (JSS)	13 - 15	Basic Education Certificate Examination	West African Examinations Council
Senior Secondary School (SSS)	15 - 18	West Africa Senior School Certificate Examination	West African Examinations Council
Tertiary Education Under-graduate	18 + 4 years		
Post-graduate	(varies according to course)		(according to course)
Teacher training	3 years	Higher Teacher Certificate	
Vocational Courses	(varies according to course)	Higher National Diploma	
Non-formal Education to meet needs of out-of-school children, youth and adults	(varies according to course)	Activities:adult and continuing education, non-formal education for children, skills-training/apprenticeships, community education, literacy programmes.	

APPENDIX 5: ETHICAL REVIEW



Sandra Wolton
PhD Candidate
School of Languages and Area Studies
University of Portsmouth

REC reference number: 13/14:36
Please quote this number on all correspondence.

11th February 2015

Dear Sandra,

Full Title of Study: An Investigation into the Status of Women and Girls in Sierra Leone

Further to our recent correspondence, this proposal was reviewed by The Research Ethics Committee of The Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences.

I am pleased to tell you that the proposal was awarded a favourable ethical opinion by the committee.

Kind regards,

FHSS FREC Chair
Dr Jane Winstone

Members participating in the review:

- David Carpenter
- Richard Hitchcock
- Geoff Wade
- Jane Winstone

APPENDIX 6: RESEARCH ETHICS REVIEW CHECKLIST

FORM UPR16**Research Ethics Review Checklist**

Please include this completed form as an appendix to your thesis (see the Research Degrees Operational Handbook for more information)

Postgraduate Research Student (PGRS) Information		Student ID:	668344
PGRS Name:	Sandra Wolton		
Department:	SLAS	First Supervisor:	Professor Tamsin Bradley
Start Date: (or progression date for Prof Doc students)	2014		
Study Mode and Route:	Part-time <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Full-time <input type="checkbox"/>	MPhil <input type="checkbox"/> PhD <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	MD <input type="checkbox"/> Professional Doctorate <input type="checkbox"/>
Title of Thesis:	Investigation into the Status of Women and Girls in Sierra Leone		
Thesis Word Count: (excluding ancillary data)	83,195		
<p>If you are unsure about any of the following, please contact the local representative on your Faculty Ethics Committee for advice. Please note that it is your responsibility to follow the University's Ethics Policy and any relevant University, academic or professional guidelines in the conduct of your study</p> <p>Although the Ethics Committee may have given your study a favourable opinion, the final responsibility for the ethical conduct of this work lies with the researcher(s).</p>			
UKRIO Finished Research Checklist: (If you would like to know more about the checklist, please see your Faculty or Departmental Ethics Committee rep or see the online version of the full checklist at: http://www.ukrio.org/what-we-do/code-of-practice-for-research/)			
a) Have all of your research and findings been reported accurately, honestly and within a reasonable time frame?	YES	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
	NO	<input type="checkbox"/>	
b) Have all contributions to knowledge been acknowledged?	YES	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
	NO	<input type="checkbox"/>	
c) Have you complied with all agreements relating to intellectual property, publication and authorship?	YES	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
	NO	<input type="checkbox"/>	
d) Has your research data been retained in a secure and accessible form and will it remain so for the required duration?	YES	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
	NO	<input type="checkbox"/>	
e) Does your research comply with all legal, ethical, and contractual requirements?	YES	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
	NO	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Candidate Statement:			
I have considered the ethical dimensions of the above named research project, and have successfully obtained the necessary ethical approval(s)			
Ethical review number(s) from Faculty Ethics Committee (or from NRES/SCREC):		13/14: 36	
If you have <i>not</i> submitted your work for ethical review, and/or you have answered 'No' to one or more of questions a) to e), please explain below why this is so:			
Signed (PGRS):			Date: 13. 10. 20